









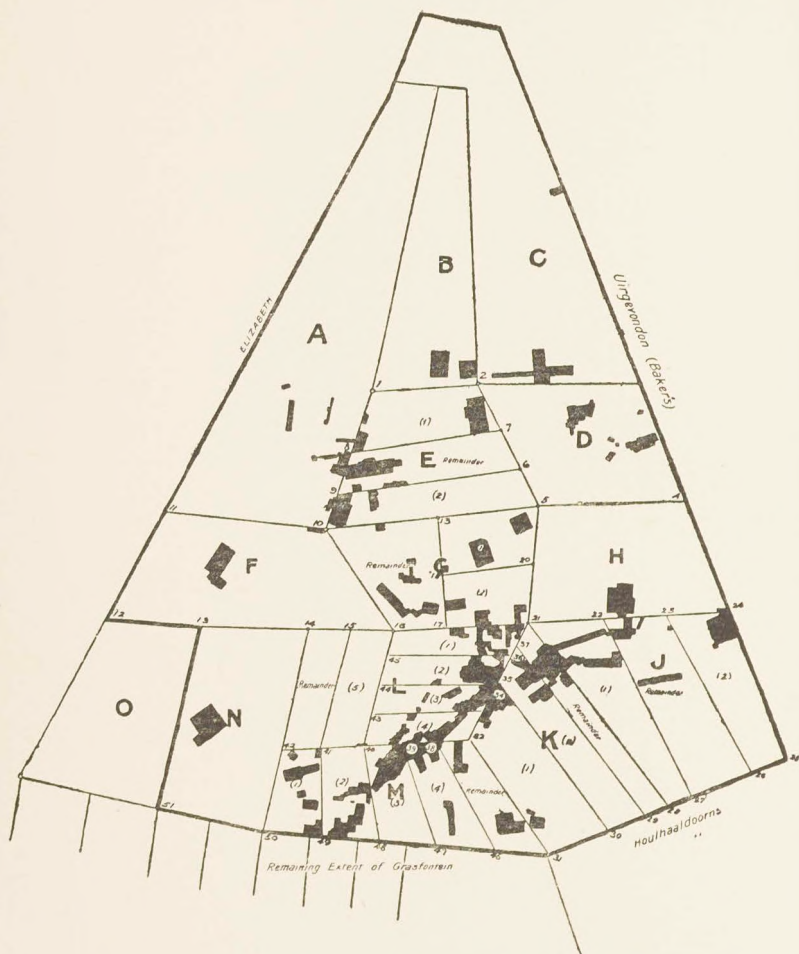




POT HOLES







A plan of Grasfontein farm before the diamond rush. The letters indicate the portions into which the farm was subdivided, and the black patches mark the reserve claims.

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POT HOLES

AN ADVENTURE OF THE DIAMOND FIELDS

BY

ELIZABETH CHARLOTTE WEBSTER



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TO
LEWIS ROSE MACLEOD



FOREWORD

THIS is an adventure story written round the great diamond rush which took place at Grasfontein, near Lichtenburg, Transvaal, on March 4th, 1927, a rush acclaimed, by those who witnessed it, as the biggest spectacle of its kind in history. So far as was compatible with the telling of my story, I have stuck to facts; diggers who hold claim licences, however, will forgive me, I hope, for occasionally using an author's one.

My thanks are due to Mr. Claude C. Devonport, and Mr. Edward Pollard Adcock, for their unfailing courtesy in assisting me with technical details; also to Mr. Charles D. Don, Editor of the *Star*, Johannesburg, for graciously permitting the reproduction of the map of Grasfontein, first published in the issue of the *Star* of March 3rd of this year. Lastly, I should like to express my gratitude to fellow writers of the *Rand Daily Mail*, from whose accounts of the rush I gleaned much valuable information.

THE AUTHOR.

INANDA,
JOHANNESBURG.
1927.



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PART I



CHAPTER I

I MEET THE KNAVE OF DIAMONDS

IT is a good maxim, when telling a story, to begin at the beginning. Strictly speaking, my adventure began on that bleak, chill afternoon in January, when I walked down the grey North Bridge of Edinburgh, with the knowledge that I had failed in yet another examination. To be perfectly honest, I had been failing in examinations all along the line, as it were. But this one was really rather like the last straw; in fact, it *was* the last straw. There is little use in my beating about the bush; I had been playing a fool's game, dabbling in journalism, scribbling verse, falling in love—doing all those entertaining and diverting things that students, it appears, should not do, and will do, one supposes, to the end of time. It was the twenty-fifth of the month, and a biting, piercing wind was sweeping the city. The caterers' windows were full of haggis, and the papers with a lot of hog-wash about Burns. I am as fond of Burns as any, and have read a good deal of his poetry (which is what few Scots can say with their hands on their hearts), but I am not one of those who believe that the Immortal Memory can only be preserved by a yearly pickling in alcohol. There were posters

on all the trams: "Burns Festival." How fiercely the Scots love the dead—the illustrious dead! Edinburgh knows where it is with a dead poet; it can deal with him, and deal handsomely. But, as Stevenson discovered, it does not choose to treat with romantic young students, longing for life and laurels. These had better get back to business, and if they are not wise enough to be of that mind of it, then let them collect their laurels elsewhere.

My father's house stands in one of the residential suburbs of the town. It is a large mansion of grey stone, built fifty years ago at that period when Domestic Virtue sat upon the throne, and it was felt that the sacred hearths and homes of Britain could not be made too secure. A high wall bounded the garden, and a postern, on the north side, labelled "Tradesmen's Entrance," gave minions access to the dungeons or basement. In front, spiked railings of surprising strength rendered the fortress impregnable, and a flight of steps led up to the massive door, spanning the black gulf of the basement as a drawbridge spans a moat. Over the moat, on the left side, was the deep oriel of the dining-room, and seated at the window, on this momentous afternoon, was the figure of my father, his white head bent over a book.

As I came swinging up the path, the gate clanging behind me, he looked up, and our eyes met. . . . He must have known, at a glance, what my news was. Nevertheless, as my cane rattled into the hall-stand, and I stood taking off coat and muffler, it pleased us both to assume a well-bred indiffer-

ence. Hostilities would commence all too soon. I sounded the trump of battle by blowing my nose sonorously, after which I opened the dining-room door, and walked in.

"Well?" he said tentatively. He was standing on the hearth-rug, his back to the blazing fire, and between us stretched the barrier of the dining-table, one corner of it laid for tea.

"Well?" said I, and because I was inwardly quaking, picked up a magazine and began idly flicking its pages. My eyes travelled, half unseeing, over a photograph of a vulgar-looking female in tights, with a lamp-shade on her head. "Miss Jaqueline Ferrers," said the caption, "who expects, shortly, to appear in——"

"I asked you a question," said my father impatiently.

I threw the magazine down and walked over to the window. "I failed, of course," I blurted out defiantly; and then added weakly: "I'm sorry."

There was a heavy, crushing silence. Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock, went the clock on the mantelpiece. Then: "Talbot John Lewis," said my father, "you are twenty-three years of age, young man, and you are going straight to hell."

I swung round sharply. "On the contrary, sir," I said, with unpardonable insolence, "I am going to South Africa."

Never, until that moment, had I ever considered for an instant the possibility of my going to South Africa. I have never fancied going to the Dominions at any time. But one had to retort; one had to say something. And somewhere I

had seen a poster, all sunshine and blue water and white surf. . . .

My father was speaking. "Talbot, the day will come when you will realize that being a father can be a bitter thing."

"Not bitterer than being a son—an only son." I was at the door now, and going into the hall, my ears flaming, my eyes moist. On the way, the housekeeper passed me, the silver teapot in her hands, magnificent in her black silk as a funeral horse.

"Don't you want any tea?" she whispered, her face very white.

"No, thank you."

I began to ascend the stairs, whistling tunelessly, savagely knocking my toes against the polished brass rods. The dining-room door opened again, and my father came into the hall.

"Talbot!" he called

"Sir?"

"One last word! Don't squander your mother's money on this—this final folly."

I went into my little study and slammed the door; then I sat down by the fire and poked it with an old foil that had once seen service at a fencing-school. It had begun to rain, and drops were driving against the window-pane. Cold, rain, bleakness, misery. I poked and poked. . . . Not touch the legacy left me by my mother! If I didn't, I had only about forty pounds in my possession. Forty pounds! Could one get to South Africa for forty pounds?

I discovered, the following morning, that one could get to South Africa for twenty-five pounds,

and succeeded in securing a berth, steerage, in the *Dalmahada*, scheduled to sail on Friday, the 28th of January. I had declared, on the spur of the moment, that I was going to South Africa, and however foolish the announcement may have been at the time, at least let it be said for me that I did not go back on my word. My feelings, on the voyage out, are best left undescribed; I should not care to analyse them. Saturday, the 19th of February, saw me walking down Adderley Street, Cape Town, under a scorching sun, looking at the black men and women, reading the Dutch signs on trams and lamp-posts and public buildings, and wondering, with a painful sinking at the heart, how I had got there, and what I was going to do. Cape Town is an extraordinarily beautiful place, but when one is financially embarrassed, the most enchanting scenery fails to enthral. To appreciate beauty, one requires both leisure and good food. A professor at the 'Varsity once said to me that it wasn't lack of love, but lack of food, that usually drove people to commit suicide, and I didn't agree with him at the time; but I do now. If I seem to dwell at too great length on the subject of dining, I can only say, in self-defence, that anyone who has spent three weeks on an emigrant ship will always have a fairly correct estimate as to the importance of good feeding in relation to good character.

That was an appalling ship! After twenty-two days of *Dalmahada* fare my *morale* was so lowered that the first thing I did on leaving her was to seek out the nearest restaurant. Most of her passengers did the same. My sympathy, for the bulk of them,

was heart-felt, for they were going on to Australia, and by the time the *Dalmahada* cooks had finished with them the Australians, I could not help thinking, would have grave cause to believe that their fair land was apparently still being 'used, by the Old Country, as a convenient dumping-ground for criminals. When I parted with my favourite steward, however, he was extremely optimistic about the matter. "Them as goes on ain't no trouble, sir. It's 'stooard this,' and 'stooard that,' and baths, baths, baths, till you gets to the Kype. But once your Kype Town passengers is dumped, it's free and easy like. Austrlyian emigrants don't bath at all."

The half-crown lunch I had in the restaurant in Adderley Street was an extravagance, but it was an extravagance that nothing could have made me forgo. South Africans, I have noticed, are very much at home in restaurants; they are like Parisians and Londoners in this respect. At my table, seated opposite, was a man wearing an old, shabby-looking suit and a soiled shirt, and yet he ate and drank with a certain amount of grace and breeding. In the homeland he would have been described as a working-man—the type, you might expect, who would put his bread into his soup, and look furtively around, as though eating in public discomfited him not a little. But he appeared to be perfectly at his ease, and quite devoid of class consciousness; he might have owned that restaurant. He looked about him fearlessly, fixed a steely, but not unfriendly blue eye on me, and said encouragingly: "Well, well, just off the

boat and looking around for the first time, are you ? ”

I told him, yes.

“ Been out to Sea Point yet ? ” he enquired. His voice had a peculiar, foreign intonation, and he clipped all his words, so that Sea Point sounded like Seep Int, or something not unlike it.

I remarked that I hadn't time to go pleasuring, and that one could not afford to stop and look at scenery when one was looking about for work. It would be foolish, I thought, to try and conceal my plight. I had only seven pounds left, and perhaps this man could help me.

He regarded me thoughtfully for a while, and then pushed his hat off his brow. “ Hell, now, that's bloody true,” he said sympathetically. Then, as though he relished the sound of his own voice, and the words he had just uttered, he repeated : “ *Bloody* true,” and went on looking at me.

I called for another helping of pudding, and waited for his next move. He had a hard, bronzed face, criss-crossed with a network of lines, and when he turned his head his profile bore a striking resemblance to that of a Red Indian brave. The hands were large and prehensile ; the mouth “ horsey ” and cruel ; but teeth and smile were excellent. I judged him to be about forty years of age ; perhaps more. The aura of many adventures was about him ; he repelled, and yet attracted. Lighting a cigarette, he puffed reflectively, and gazed with a glazed, searching eye through the open door at the sun-baked street beyond. Then, with a sudden, quick glance, he looked over at me.

"Jobs aren't so easy to get nowadays," he observed.

"No?"

"Not Government jobs, anyway; there's a Dutch Government in power. Don't you forget that, young man. D'you know anything about South African politics?"

I said, very little.

"Gee," said he, "the less you know the better! Look at this here flag question, for one thing! What they want in the way of a flag for *this* country, I tell you, is a picture of a cow with an Englishman at the head of her, a Dutchman at the tail, and a Jew milking." He winked. "Get that into your head, keep your eyes open and your mouth shut, and you'll know pretty soon how to get about in this country. It's a great country! What were Cecil Rhodes's last words? '*So much to do, so many done.*'" He winked again. "You'll be all right, a smart young chap like you! You go right to Joh'burg; that's the place for you. The Cape's well enough, but Joh'burg's a young town for young people. There's life there. Pretty girls. Not that you won't see them pretty enough round here, but the Joh'burg women—gee! they're high-fliers!" And he winked for the third time. "Afraid of work?" he questioned suddenly.

I assured him, no; I couldn't afford to be. I was willing to do clerking, reporting, travelling. Failing everything, I would go down the mines.

"H'm," said he, "you're up against it, all right! You're up against it!" And then he considered me silently for a while. "Say, why don't you go

to Lichtenburg ? ” he remarked presently. “ You’ve got nothing to lose, I’ll be bound.”

“ Lichtenburg ? ” I echoed.

“ You don’t mean to say,” said he, “ that you’ve arrived in this country practically on the eve of the biggest diamond rush in history, and don’t know it ? ” And his blue eyes danced. “ God ! ” he burst out, “ if I’d a clean young pair of limbs like yours, wouldn’t I go to Lichtenburg, make tracks for Grasfontein, and run like bloody hell for a claim ! ” And he banged his fist on the table. “ Wouldn’t I, by heaven ! ” He closed his eyes cunningly, and half opened them again. “ I’m an old digger,” he confided. “ Gold diggings—diamond diggings. Know the whole damn business from A to Z—but especially Z, for I’m always at the tail end of my luck. Up against it ! Digger’s life, young man ! But it’s *the* life ! Wherever there’s a diamond rush on, there you’ll find old Jim Rathouse. That’s me.” He tapped his chest, raised his hat, scratched his head, and then let the brim fall again. “ Hell,” he said suddenly, “ where’s that girl ? I must be off ! ”

I looked around for the waitress, and made some rapid calculations. Then I stood up, trembling. “ Diamonds,” I murmured. “ Grasfontein.” I was dazed ; I felt in a sort of dream. “ I say,” I burst out, “ won’t you take me along with you ? ” And I blushed scarlet, ashamed of my own boldness.

The waitress gave him his change, and he picked up the coins in the most casual fashion, and clinked them slowly into his pocket.

“ Well, damn my eyes ! ” said he, “ why not ? ”

CHAPTER II

I BECAME A CHAMPION SPRINTER

RATHOUSE and I entrained for Johannesburg that evening ; he knew the unhappy state of my finances, and I put myself utterly at his mercy. If I remember rightly, my railway fare north, second-class, cost something over five pounds, which left me with little more than a good handful of silver. That I was worried goes without saying, but my companion was in such excellent spirits that it was difficult to become too despondent. Moreover, the novelty and strangeness of everything served, at every turn, to keep my mind and eye fully engaged. It was not only a new country to me ; it was a new world. The very air seemed charged with adventure and mystery. Before the train moved out of the station into the gulf of blackness that lay beyond the lights of the town, I stood leaning out of the carriage window watching the people thronging the platform. They seemed exactly like the people of the Old Country ; yet they were curiously unlike. Their accent was different ; so also was their general bearing. Strange to think of this civilization existing thousands of miles from one's own land, the same and yet not the same ! I watched a young man in the compartment beside

me reading a newspaper. The paper was filled with South African news ; every name was foreign to me. But this man read avidly ; he was quite at home with his paper. This was home to him —this place where one heard the soft guttural of Afrikaans, native women passed with babies on their backs, and native boys vended fruit and magazines. It was home to him, and it was home to Rathouse ; so much so, in fact, that that gentleman was already fast asleep.

Our compartment was not altogether uncomfortable ; it contained six beds, three on either side, which folded down like bunks, and for an extra shilling a native provided passengers with blankets. These were unnecessary, however ; it was almost stiflingly hot, and, what with the heat and the rocking and swaying of the train, I lay awake most of the night. There were five men in the compartment, counting Rathouse and me ; one of the three strangers was English, the other was a raw-boned young Boer, and the third a grey-bearded Hollander, who slept in the bunk opposite mine, and, much to everybody's annoyance, muttered prayers to himself in Dutch until the small hours, terminating each of his offices with an "Ay-ay-ay-men," reminiscent of the bleating of a lost sheep in a lone Highland glen. Towards dawn I dozed, and when I awoke it was already light, and the train was rattling over mile upon mile of veld. The Hollander was reading a volume by Multatuli, and the Englishman was standing in his pants washing his face at the little zinc basin at the end of the compartment, close by my head.

He put a wet hand on my brow and bade me good-morning, remarking pleasantly that we had passed the Hex River valley overnight, and that he was sorry I had missed seeing it, as the scenery was especially fine.

"Scenery isn't in his line," said Rathouse, who was pulling on his boots.

"No? What *is* his line?" said the Englishman, towelling himself vigorously. He was rather an amiable young man of about thirty, very much like any London clerk.

I had risen and stripped to the waist, and stood stretching myself like a cat.

"Look at the sweet pretty ripple of them muscles! There you have a man before you who's taken part in the Olympic games," said Rathouse suddenly. "Runs like poetry! Sprinter. Amateur champion." And he leaned forward and grasped my legs. "Feel his sinews," he said admiringly.

I flushed up like a girl, and tried to meet his gaze; but he scowled darkly at me, put a knowing finger to his nose, and then smiled.

"How frightfully interesting!" exclaimed the Englishman ingenuously. "I suppose," he said enthusiastically, "you're going to run for a claim at Grasfontein?"

"That's where he's going. You've said it," said Rathouse, before I had time to make any protest. "There's a syndicate, Joh'burg way, offered him seventy-five quid down to run for them and peg a claim. Fact! That's a sweet little bit of money to get just for covering a few miles quicker than anyone else, but it's worth it to those sharks

who are forking it out. Oh, it's worth it, all right ! ”

“ So ? ” said the Englishman.

Rathouse leaned forward. “ See here,” said he, “ do you know anything about Grasfontein ? ”

“ Well, I've heard it's going to be a pretty likely thing,” said the Englishman confidentially. “ As a matter of fact, I'm spending my holiday there. Thought I'd take some back leave, you know, and try my luck.”

Rathouse smiled. “ You mark my words, every man jack on this train is making for Grasfontein. I reckon, between ourselves, that this is about the biggest thing that's coming off in this country for many a long day. Likely ? It's a dead cert. See here, I know the big pot who prospected it. Darcy's the name. Darcy. Got a house in the Munro Drive in Joh'burg that would make Buckingham Palace look sick. Three cars. Rolling in it. Wife's dead, and he's got a daughter he spends cash on like water. Why ? Well, I'll tell you. He's a Government surveyor, and he's got a claim down there. If you're a Government surveyor, my boy, you can pick yourself out a pretty sure bit of ground before the diggings are proclaimed. I've seen his claim. I was working it for him with a gang of boys, alongside of a chap called Shepherd. You could have gone down the sides of it, man, and scooped the diamonds out with a soup-ladle.”

“ Is that a fact ? ” said the Englishman. His eyes goggled.

“ Fact ? It's gospel,” said Rathouse. “ Gospel !

I tell you, the runner who pegs his claim next any portion of the reserve will be standing with a bloody fortune under his feet. That's all them big pots wants—a runner. D'you blame them for paying down seventy-five quid, cash, when a good claim means thousands? I tell you, man, it's a crimson shame! You and me in this business—where do we stand? Where do we stand against the professional sprinter? Nowhere at all!" And he went out to the corridor and expectorated, thoughtfully, over the window. "You'd best start doing your physical jerks, Lightning," he remarked playfully to me. "He's got to keep fit, you know," he announced to the inmates of the carriage. "A spare diet—meat, and no potatoes, or anything fattening. You don't get a physique like that for nothing, I reckon."

I stood, utterly tongue-tied, striving to hide my confusion by busying myself with soap and water. The young Boer, still in his bunk, lay regarding me with the deepest interest, as though I were a god dropped from another planet; but the old Hollander, fortunately enough, went on reading *Multatuli*, and did not raise his head to favour me with so much as a glance.

"I suppose, now, you'll be pegging a claim for yourself as well as for this syndicate?" said the Englishman curiously.

"Oh, he's all there," said Rathouse. "He's Scotch. What d'you take him for? Of *course* he's pegging for himself, and for me, too. We're partners, as a matter of fact. You wouldn't think of throwing your lot in, would you?"

"Well, I've got a pal waiting for me at Lichtenburg," said the Englishman.

"Got a runner?"

"No. I was thinking of running myself."

Rathouse shook his head. "Now, see here," said he, "what chance d'you think you've got? Mind you, I'm speaking as a friend. I know the ropes. If I were you—but this is no business of mine—I'd give that young Lewis, there, a tenner to peg for you. Five cash down, and five when he's pegged. D'you hear me, Lewis?"

I faced him and flashed him an agonized glance. "Oh, no, no! I'm sorry, I couldn't—I really couldn't," I said quickly.

"Well, I'm not prepared to give more," said the Englishman, happily ignorant of the reason underlying this abrupt refusal. "I couldn't give more. But I'll ask my pal, if you like. I could let you know, if you give me an address. My name's Simcox. P. O. Lichtenburg would find me, any time, before the rush." And he put on his jacket, and turned to the old Hollander. "Well, oldest inhabitant, it's your turn to get near the wash-basin, is it not?" he remarked genially.

"*Ja?* You speak?" asked the old man, looking up sharply.

The Englishman repeated his remark.

"*Wash? Niet, niet!*" cried the Hollander angrily. "I—I am interested in what is inside the head. You wash the outside. Good and well. It is all you have, my friend." And he resumed his book with perfect composure.

This passage of arms served to give me the

opportunity of slipping into the corridor unobserved, and I was quick to seize it. Nevertheless, Rathouse's eagle eye had noted my departing figure, and with a few masterful strides he was after me.

"Look here, young Lewis," he remarked, incredulity expressed in every intonation of his voice, "what, in heaven's name, do you think you are?"

"Not a champion sprinter, at any rate," I said hotly.

He looked at me witheringly. "Oh, indeed! So *that's* the way of it, is it? You'd better learn, then, that you've got to be damn well anything under the sun when you've got nothing in your pocket. Just remember that, will you? You can run for that chap Simcox, and to Jericho with the consequences! You get ten quid for running. Never mind *how* you run. That isn't in the bargain; that's *his* look-out, isn't it? Back you go for that money, young man, or I wash my hands of you."

I hesitated, and then the door of the dining-car swung open, and my nostrils sniffed the odour of bacon and eggs, and warm, brown toast. The morning air was faintly chill, and I was tired and hungry. There can be no denying that my temptation was great. But it is to my lasting shame that I turned and walked back without a word.

CHAPTER III

I ARRIVE IN JOHANNESBURG

THE rest of the journey was uneventful enough. Ours was a slow train, and we did not reach our destination until Monday night, the 21st of February. I spent most of my time, during Sunday, pacing the corridors wrestling with my conscience, or standing on the little outside landing, between the long carriages of the train, gazing disconsolately upon that great, barren waste, the Karroo. There was, to me, something terrifying about the immensity of the wilderness. The lines of the hills of home are soft and undulating, a series of graceful sweeps and curves upon the horizon. But the kopjes of the karroo are fierce, jagged, and primeval; they cut the skyline with a serrated edge, and are all angles. One was reminded, curiously enough, of the temperature chart of an invalid whose fever has capriciously risen and fallen until the fountain pen of his nurse has, by slow degrees, traced a range of peaks across the white paper. The difference between English hills and South African kopjes is the difference between "Sally in our Alley" and the Japanese national anthem; or the difference between the second movement of the Pathétique sonata of Beethoven and the

finale of the Pathétique symphony of Tschaikowsky. I was impressed with the scenery, but I was also a little afraid—afraid of the stark, naked grandeur of seemingly never-ending miles of barren peaks and plains. The colour effects were startling—too crude, perhaps, for paints, but wonderful for crayons. Before the sun dipped, one might have imagined that some giant child had hurriedly splashed the sky with orange, and then carelessly picked up a purple crayon and dashed in the shadows. Then the mountains changed to black, the orange dimmed to deep blue, and the night came down like a heavy velvet curtain, frosted with stars.

On Monday the scenery became less desolate, and therefore less picturesque ; one actually saw greenish-brown fields, and the train seemed to take fresh heart and quicken its pace. The view from the compartment window, however, never appeared to interest my travelling companions. The old Hollander had laid aside *Multatuli*, and was busy with the poetry of Heine, his eyes fixed steadfastly on the printed page ; and the young Boer slept, like the dormouse at the mad tea-party in "Alice." Every few hours he would sit up stupidly, swallow a cup of coffee or some soup brought by the steward, and then lapse drowsily into slumber again. Rathouse, when he was not sleeping, was eating, and when he was not eating was playing cards. All three he could do excellently ; but in regard to the card-playing I entertained the strongest suspicions. He spent a large portion of his time in the next compartment, playing with two other men, and if there was any money lost, I do not think

that it was lost by him. More I will not say. But I rather think he knew how to make travelling profitable, and that that train service and route were well known to him. He never invited me to join in the play ; he apologized to his friends for the restless way in which I kept pacing to and fro in the corridor like a caged animal, by remarking that it was a sore business for an athletic chap to be boxed up, and that a fellow's limbs got stiff if he didn't keep on the move. " And, mark you," he would add, " he's been three weeks at sea over and above everything, and being penned up like that is just sheer hell for an athlete." I do not know whether or no it is sheer hell for an athlete to be penned up, but one thing I can safely swear to ; Rathouse's remarks were sheer hell to one down-and-out homesick, heartsick, trainsick undergraduate.

I had little to choose from, in the way of company. The Englishman, Simcox, was never to be seen after breakfast, and forsook us altogether for the society of a lymphatic blonde with a deep bosom and very substantial limbs, whom he introduced to me as his fiancée. This appeared to occasion Rathouse the greatest mirth. Having passed the lady in the corridor one morning, he remarked, cryptically, that if she were Simcox's fiancée, himself had been engaged to her several times on previous runs from the Cape ; after which observation he tapped his nose, in his usual knowing fashion, and resumed his card-playing with an added zest. I endeavoured to purify the atmosphere, at this juncture, by returning to my compartment

and engaging the old Hollander in conversation, and attempted to open a discussion on literature by asking the greybeard what he thought of the moderns. "Bah!" he exclaimed, "pig-swill!" And impatiently picking up his book, he turned his back on me, and refused to entertain me further.

If my memory serves me aright, I think we steamed into Johannesburg about seven o'clock on Monday night. I had been devising a plan whereby I would elude Rathouse at the station, but at the last minute my courage failed me. He had Simcox's five pounds; I had only twelve and sixpence between me and destitution. I had lied to the immigration authorities in my immigration papers, boasting that I had fifty pounds in my possession, and my position was anything but happy. I reluctantly came to the conclusion that I had better stick to Rathouse until I knew my way about a little. But I found that my plans had already been made for me. Rathouse evidently had every intention of sticking as close—if not closer—to me than a brother, for he linked his arm in mine as we left the station, and introduced me to a friend of his who greeted him outside, as though I were a boon companion.

"Jim," said the stranger, "we done our best to get into kcommunication with you, but we couldn't find where you was till we got that wire. Clara was married this morning. Rode pillion on Archie Reitz's bike, and the two of 'em got spliced at ten o'clock at the Magistrate's Court."

"Now, devil take her!" cried Rathouse, "why the deuce does she want to get married on the eve

of a diamond rush?" He turned and made some explanatory statements to me. "Clara's my sister," he confided. "It isn't as if she was doing this out of curiosity. She's been married before. Divorced her first: custody of the two children. Then here she gets tangled up with a Dutchie! Well, Archie Reitz is all right as a digger, but as a brother-in-law I've no use for him, and that's straight. A pal's a pal so long as he *is* a pal. But when he turns into a relation, that's the end of friendship."

"Jim, I seen that before," said the stranger. He was a weather-beaten man of the name of Hoxie, not unlike Rathouse, but fully ten years his junior, and shorter in stature. We promptly repaired to the station bar, and had some beer and sandwiches, Rathouse talking volubly, and slapping almost every second man he met on the back. The bar was brilliantly lighted, and thronged with men, many of them in old khaki shirts and trousers, and wearing Tom Mix hats. One heard the name "Grasfontein" continually; Grasfontein was apparently going to be the solution of everybody's difficulties, and the fulfilment of everybody's most cherished hopes. Beer after beer, and whisky after whisky were swallowed in the name of Grasfontein, and when Rathouse and his old friend had emptied as many glasses as they decently could, we sallied forth into the lighted streets again. My companions certainly carried their liquor like gentlemen; after two whiskies and innumerable beers their deportment could hardly have been called in question.

The town reminded me very much of portions of London. As we ambled down several broad streets, exotic-looking women, wrapped in bright, silken shawls, their mouths scarlet as pomegranate fruits, flitted by us on their way to theatres and dance-halls. Strolling under the glare of one of the street lamps, we passed a knot of men and young women, and one of the girls in the group threw back her head and flashed me the most arch, provocative smile. "Hi, there, Billie!" cried one of the youths, and the siren smiled again, and thrust her little pink tongue out. Hoxie was plainly attracted, and would gladly have loitered, but Rathouse told him acidly that there was such a thing as carrying optimism too far, and proceeded to illustrate his meaning by putting his hand in one of my empty pockets and turning out the lining of it. The little girl waved a playful hand until we had rounded a corner. She was certainly very pretty; but I thought her too radiant to be sober.

We made a detour of several streets, Hoxie purchasing cigarettes from a tobacconist's, and three bottles of whisky from a bottle store. Then presently we turned back in the direction of the station, where an old, battered Ford stood in a dimly-lighted side alley-way.

"Ah, this is him!" cried Rathouse, as though hailing an old and treasured friend.

We climbed into the car, and it moved off, spluttering and complaining, into the darkness.

CHAPTER IV

I ATTEND A WEDDING FEAST

THERE is a marvellous, magical stillness about a South African night ; it is a song in silence. As that rickety, ramshackle Ford left the straggling lights of the suburbs far behind, and adventured into the blackness of the veld, it seemed the only noisy thing in a charmed world of utter and complete quietude. As we rattled along, and I looked up into the blue—that infinity of blue, it was as though the stars were raining down on me like great crystal beads, or a rocket, shot by the gods, was showering the heavens with white fire. Under the sky the trees brooded, witch-like, and little kopjes crouched, prehistoric monsters hewn in rock. How clear the air was ! As my companions laughed and shouted, their voices and the throb of the engine seemed to reverberate and echo far, far into the darkness.

We were going, it transpired, to the house of Archie Reitz, who had married Rathouse's sister that morning. The programme appeared to me to be a most unusual one ; it was hardly considerate, I thought, for three guests to quarter themselves on a newly-married couple on the wedding

night. But I was yet to learn how some Dutch marriages are celebrated, and how extraordinarily complicated a Dutch household can often be. There were many wonderful surprises in store for me.

Rathouse and Hoxie talked animatedly during our perilous journey in that dilapidated relic of Henry Ford's enterprise, but I did not overhear much of the conversation, for I was behind with the whisky bottles and the valises, and was being so badly bumped and shaken about that I expected to be pitchforked, any moment, right on to the road. Hoxie's driving bordered on the miraculous; he made that car take boulders as gracefully as a blood horse can take a fence. There was no road; that is to say, there was no made road. We were on a track of sorts, but it was so uneven, and most of the way ran parallel with such deep forbidding-looking ditches, that it seemed to me no route could very well have been worse. In the sickly glare of our headlights, these little ravines or *dongas*, as they are called, would gape evilly at us out of the darkness; but Hoxie drove on, unperturbed. I think he enjoyed the bumps. After a particularly rough passage, when the car would lurch on its side like a ship in distress, he would glance over his shoulder and shout spiritedly: "You 'aven't smashed the whisky bottles, 'ave ye, Scotty?" From his breezy, affable manner, one might have supposed that I was a life-long acquaintance, who had shared with him a thousand confidences and experiences.

Our intrepid chauffeur drew up on the crest of

a kopje, five or six miles from town. As the car reluctantly crept up this hill—an ascent that was something of a nightmare—we were hailed by a bevy of excited small boys, who bore down on us upon bicycles, ringing bells, shouting, and cheering vociferously. I found that we had arrived at a short distance from a small, brilliantly-lighted shanty, and that fully a dozen cars were parked round it. I also saw a couple of horses grazing near by, and noted what appeared to be one or two small carts and “spiders.” A crowd of people were gathered about the door of the house, and above the croaking of frogs and chirping of crickets one could hear the cracked notes of an old piano, and the sound of an accordion. As we approached the scene of revelry several persons rushed forward dramatically, and grasped Rathouse by the hand. Children squealed and pushed, women giggled, and men shouted. Some of the small boys, worked into a kind of frenzy of enthusiasm, kept careering round and round on their bicycles as though they were wound up like mechanical toys, and couldn’t stop even if they chose. A number of people, I noticed, were squatting on the ground, eating and drinking with the utmost heartiness; indeed, so far as I could see, a constant stream of lemonade and cake-bearers kept issuing from the portals of the shanty, while a second stream ran back again, empty-handed. The buzz of conversation was deafening, and the whole spectacle resembled nothing so much as a beehive, whose inmates are on the eve of swarming. In the midst of this hubbub, a demented-looking man, wearing a garland of paper

flowers, ran out and fell upon Rathouse's neck, and having been told that I was Rathouse's friend he promptly fell upon mine. I was thereupon informed that he was Archie Reitz, the bridegroom, and was immediately dragged and pushed by him into the shanty, Rathouse and Hoxie, with the whisky bottles, bringing up the rear.

Within the shack, pandemonium had broken loose. It was a miserable little house, with no doors, yards of cheap cretonne being suspended over the empty doorways in a poor attempt at privacy. The rooms were tiny, and packed with guests: festoons of coloured paper hung from the ceilings, and dangled on top of the men's heads. In the centre of the chief apartment was a large table, groaning with pastries and cakes of every description, and round this table were grouped the relatives of the bride and bridegroom. A rather faded young woman, in a pale blue dress, was dragged out of a corner by Reitz and introduced to me as the bride. Nobody, so far as I could observe, was taking the slightest notice of her; interest, I perceived, was centred on the cake, which had not yet been cut, and which was being zealously guarded by a stout, but exhausted-looking woman with white hair, who, I was informed, was Archie Reitz's widowed sister, Mrs. Jeppe.

Mrs. Jeppe told me, impressively, that she had made the cake, and that she was all anxiety to see if it was as it should be. She also told me she was very, very tired, a fact which I did not, for an

instant, doubt. These confidences imparted, she quite casually broke the news that she had bonded a large portion of her land, and was going down to Grasfontein to make her fortune on the proceeds. All this she confided to me as though I were a blood relation ; but in regard to myself, she did not evince the slightest curiosity. None of them did ; I was accepted as a friend of Rathouse's, and all interest in me seemed to begin and end there. Whereas it would be impossible to drink tea in a Fife fishing-village without, in a measure, giving one's hostess a brief outline of one's family history back to that obscure period when one's grandmother "married on" one's grandfather, I found that my family history, my financial state, and my social position were of no moment to these people. I *was* ; but it did not seem to matter, in the least, why I was, or how I was, or what I was. I told them my name was Lewis, and they were perfectly satisfied.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," said Rathouse, stepping forward, and fixing his eye on the ceiling, "we are about to cut the cake." I could see that he had not been behindhand in broaching the contents of one of Hoxie's whisky bottles. "We will drink the health of the bride and bridegroom, and we will give a hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Lewis, who is going to—who is going to—who will astonish us all at Grasfontein by his—by his ability gained while sprinting on the Olympus heights." He swayed a little and sat down.

"Hear, hear," said a man with touching earnestness, and there was a great deal of vigorous hand-

clapping, after which a search was made for the bride, who was discovered in another apartment trying to soothe her offspring, the pledges of her first love, who were crying themselves sick with tiredness, and had reached that stage when nothing in Christendom, or out of it, would serve to pacify them.

"Clara, you're wanted!" somebody shouted.

The bride, flustered and dishevelled as a result of her maternal labours, came forward apologetically, and cut the cake with the purposeful air of a young woman in a baker's shop, who finds herself serving an impatient customer. Throwing the knife down, she then hastened out of the room again, whereupon Rathouse rose, and clearing his throat, said with marked solemnity: "Ladies and gentlemen, this cake is now open for discussion and acceptance." This remarkable utterance concluded, he unsteadily helped himself to another glass of whisky, and sat down as though in a trance.

At this interesting stage in the proceedings somebody tapped me on the shoulder, and turning round I found myself looking into the face of a stout, rather elderly man, wearing an immaculately tailored suit, and faultless linen. "You are the young gentleman from England?" he queried softly. "You know how to run, it seems?"

I evaded the questions. "Scotsmen never run, sir," I said banteringly.

He smiled. "Rathouse has picked you for me," he confided. "Rathouse is to be one of my men, you know. My name is du Toit." (He pronounced

the name du Toy.) "Perhaps we could talk outside?"

I helped myself to some sandwiches, and followed him to the door.

CHAPTER V

I HEAR SOMETHING OF "HA-RASS-FON-TAIN"

Du Toit threaded his way through the clusters of men and women grouped about the door outside, and led me to a solitary spot under the shelter of some tall trees. Here, the raucous croaking of the frogs was like the throb and roar of a motor-cycle engine heard in the distance. We were seated almost on the summit of a kopje, with a wide expanse of dark veld rolling away before us, and on a raised plateau, miles off, glittered the lights of Johannesburg, a million candles lighted on a giant altar.

"Well," said du Toit, "of what are you thinking?" He had, I may say, a rather gracious way of talking, and his voice was mellow-toned and soft. It was a cultured voice; but then, du Toit was a cultured man. What he was doing amid that ill-assorted, motley throng gathered in and around Reitz's house, I could not guess. Fresh from Britain, where the dwellers in the working-class areas of a city can never hope to rub shoulders with the residents in the fashionable quarters, and where one's social position is determined, to a large extent, by the street one lives in, the presence of du Toit

among the other wedding guests, puzzled and disturbed me. An English gentleman might consent to be present at a wedding feast in the East End of London, but I doubt if he would enjoy himself there; neither he nor his host would be at ease. The Dutch, however, are totally different. The highest Dutchman in South Africa fraternizes with the lowest, and they enjoy fraternizing. It sounds like the socialists' dream come true, but unfortunately it did not strike me in that way. The thought that came to me, later in the evening, when I saw du Toit dipping biscuits in his coffee, and exchanging coarse jokes with a backvelder, was that he had lost a great deal of his dignity.

"Yes," said my new companion, "of what are you thinking?"

"The Brompton Oratory," I told him, looking at the lights of the town.

"Ah," said he, "look up at the stars, and that will make you think about diamonds. What is it that Keats said? 'The dark, silent blue, with all its diamonds trembling through and through.' That is it! Look at Venus, there! I wonder how many carat? I shouldn't mind my boys turning her up in one of my washes." He laughed softly, and lay down on the veld grass, hands behind his head. "Look at the Belt of Orion, right above you! Three choice stones for a lady's engagement ring! Know anything about diamonds?"

I told him, nothing whatever.

"Good," said he. "But you'll learn, all too

soon ! I think that when a man once finds a diamond or two, it gets into his blood, like a drug. And just as a drug slowly saps one's moral sense away, diamonds sap the moral sense away. Well, you're fresh blood ; that's what I want. Down at Lichtenburg, just now, it's a case of diamond cut diamond. Diggers are the best chaps in the world, mark you ! But they're only human. He's a queer chap who doesn't try and snaffle a diamond or two for himself. If I were down-and-out, perhaps I'd do the same. But I'm not down-and-out. It so happens I've had some shares in a claim that's all but exhausted, but has proved wonderfully lucrative. I'm part-owner of a profitable concern, and I've got to look after my own interests. Do you follow me ? ”

I said I thought I did, but that I would be obliged if he would make himself perfectly clear.

“ Very well, then,” said he, “ we'll begin. What was Rathouse doing down at the Cape ? ”

I told him, in some surprise, that I hadn't the foggiest idea.

“ Well, neither have we,” said du Toit promptly. “ But I'll explain everything fully. By ‘ we ’ I mean a gentleman called Darcy and myself. Darcy is one of the Government surveyors. As a matter of fact, it was he who prospected the farm of Grasfontein.”

“ Yes ? ” I said eagerly, fascinated by the way in which he pronounced the word “ Grasfontein.” The first syllable seemed to come through his nose, and the name sounded like *Ha-rass-fon-tain*, the

"Ha-rass" gargled at the back of the throat and slurred over quickly, "rass" and "tain" strongly accented.

"Darcy prospected Grasfontein," he went on. "It had been on the market for the sum of four hundred pounds—something like half a crown a morgen, that is to say. A morgen is a little over two acres. Now, when diamonds are discovered on a bit of land, the owners are entitled to a certain portion of it, and the rest becomes the property of the Government. The owners can, of course, select their own portion, and sell out claims if they are so minded. Darcy purchased one of these claims, in which I have had a share, as I already told you. Owners' claims are usually called the reserve. When the farm is thrown open to the public by the Government on the 25th of this month—Friday next—prospective diggers will be lined up, and at a given signal they will run, pegs in hand, and each man will peg a claim or claims for himself and friends, at whatever spot he chooses, provided he pegs *outside* the reserve. Is that quite clear to you?"

I said I thought it was.

"Now," said he, "you will understand the importance of getting a good runner." (I began to feel very uncomfortable.) "Those in the know have a pretty fair idea where the richest spots lie. The chances are, that if one of the reserve claims has proved profitable, the seam will be continued, and the man who pegs over that seam is likely to make a fortune. Darcy's claims lie in a certain spot on—but I'm not at liberty to give away the

alphabetical letter of the portion just yet. You must see Darcy, and if he takes a liking to you, and trusts you, he will show you a map of Grasfontein farm, and explain where he wants his new claims pegged. He can't peg any more claims in his own name, as a matter of fact. But he wants them pegged in his daughter's name, as a sort of birthday present to her. She will be nineteen, I believe, on the fourth of March."

"And where," said I, "do *you* come in?"

"Well," said he, "Darcy's a busy man. He's a great friend of mine, and although I'm not having shares in his daughter's claims I've promised to look after the working of them, as an obligation. I can take all the trouble of the working of the claims off his hands, and that, of course, saves him a considerable amount of worry. One runs such grave risks, young man. The theft is terrible; one can trust nobody. Nobody! Remember that. The native boys are out to steal, the native boss-boy is out to steal, the white men who are overseeing are out to steal, and the diamond buyers are out to do their—but we shan't become profane. If the owner makes anything to shout about, when every other fellow has had his pound of flesh, then the claim must have been rich indeed."

"And Rathouse and Reitz? Where do *they* stand?" I inquired, for on this point I was particularly curious.

"Ah, we're coming to them," he said. "We're coming to them. Great fellows, they are. Old

diggers, you know. They're wonderful hands at bossing up the natives, and they thoroughly know their business. But, as I say, this is a job where you've got to keep your eyes skinned. Rathouse, for instance, hopped off to the Cape last week, on the pretext that his brother was dying in hospital there, or something of the kind. I forget what his story was. It may have been true, but when a man is acting as overseer for someone on the diggings, and disappears suddenly, without warning, one has a right to entertain one's suspicions. Supposing Rathouse had found the second Cullinan—for we are only forty miles here from the spot where the Cullinan was discovered. It is probable that he would have been off aboard the first tramp steamer bound for heaven knows where, and that would have been the last of him, so far as Darcy was concerned. As it is, he turns up, full of enthusiasm, with a sprinter. Well, everything looks all right, and everything *may* be all right, but you'd better see Darcy to-morrow." He took a cigarette from a silver case, tapped it thoughtfully, and struck a match; then, absently, he passed the cigarette-case along to me. "Sorry," he said.

The strains of Beethoven's famous Minuet, tortured into jazz, came drifting to us from the house. A female, with a powerful voice for street singing, began demanding imperiously of the calm night air: "Do you regret?"

"Do you?" asked du Toit.

I rose and stretched myself. Then I looked up, and flung my challenge to the stars. "No, not a

bit of it!" I cried. "But I have been thinking that one might do worse than carry a little automatic about with one, down at Lichtenburg."

"Well, one might," he said softly.

CHAPTER VI

I GO INTO TRAINING

THE nuptial feast and dance lasted, I believe, until the first flush of dawn ; but I took my departure long before then. I unstrapped the rug that had been fastened to my valise, wrapped it round myself like a Roman toga, and went to sleep under some trees, at a spot situated about a hundred yards away from the house. But for the shrilling of the crickets and the chatter of frogs, it was silent as the tomb there. I slept soundly—the first sleep I had had on *terra firma* for over three weeks ; but I was now on *terra firma* with a vengeance. It was not until I awoke at six o'clock that I realized how very hard my bed had been. I was stiff with cold, and all my bones ached. The chill morning air seemed to cut through me like a knife. I got up, my teeth chattering, and commenced running across the veld, describing a wide circle. Nobody was abroad, but after I had been sprinting for a quarter of an hour, and had begun to feel a welcome glow of warmth creep over my body, several natives gathered on the stoep and stood regarding me with friendly interest.

There was a little pool of what looked like clean

water at the foot of the kopje upon which the house was poised so precariously, and I took a towel from my bag and went down to the margin of the dam in order to bathe. My ablutions, however, were not quite so thorough as I could have wished, for a little native girl of about seven years of age accompanied me to the pool, and stood by, anxious, it appeared, to superintend the smallest detail of my toilet. I gave her a *ticky* (a three-penny piece) to go away, but this only served to make her all the more determined to remain. Later, she thought her patience well rewarded, for she witnessed what, to her, must have been the most thrilling spectacle of that morning. She saw me shave. I went up to the house and procured a little basin of hot water from a native girl, whom I found busy in the kitchen. This girl spoke to me in remarkably good English; but the average native, I have since learned, can make the European (and, in particular, the Briton) look foolish where the business of mastering languages is concerned. I afterwards met natives at the diggings who could talk three native languages, and, in addition, English and Afrikaans.

After my three weeks on the *Dalmahada*, I found my wardrobe to be in a somewhat dejected state. There was an old native crone hobbling about the kitchen, and by signs and gesticulations I managed to convey to her the fact that I wanted a little washing done. I gave her a shilling, which was all—and much more—than I could well afford, and she took my valise outside, and commenced washing my linen in a wooden tub, under the shade

of a high hedge. The sun was already up by this time, the bright, optimistic sun of South Africa, that floods every new day with hope. The view from the little kopje was incredibly fine; the air seemed so sharp, so buoyant, so clear, that the white houses of the town, clinging like limpets to the rocky sides of the Houghton Ridge, appeared fantastically near. Where the early sun caught them, they seemed to scintillate. Like peaks capped with snow, I saw the mountainous powder heaps of the gold mines; but between me and the city lay a great sweep of open veld, dotted all over with orchards and farm steadings.

At eight o'clock people began to appear from all corners of the house, like a swarm of blackbeetles creeping out after dark. They had been sleeping everywhere and anywhere, and were now anxious to get breakfast and hasten off to town. The first white man I encountered that morning, strangely enough was none other than the bridegroom. Afterwards, when I really got to know Archie Reitz, I always knew that one could count on seeing him turn up at the least expected time, and that on all occasions he could be trusted to do the least expected thing. But at this stage of my South African adventure he was an enigma to me, and I answered his questions warily.

"God!" he burst out, "a happy New Year to you, Scotty! You're pretty hot stuff on your pegs, I reckon. When I looked out of my bedroom window this morning I said to Clara—Clara's my

wife, you know—I said to Clara: ‘Clara,’ I said, ‘by gee, but that young fellow can run!’ Do you know it takes three engines up here to do what one engine can do at the Cape! Altitude, man! Altitude! See here, you’re six thousand mile above sea level up on the Reef here. And I could tell you a story about that, too. There was a chap once landed a most vallyable race-horse at the Cape, and rushed him into a race up in these parts, and God! that horse couldn’t run at all. Altitude, you see. Altitude. Of course, the chap who owned him should have let him get his wind, like. A month or two, and that horse would have run as sweet as you please. But he didn’t know nothing. Up he brings that horse, as full of himself as a boxer before a boxing match, and a ricksha boy could have strolled past him to the post.” He looked at me eagerly. “D’you know who’ll win the Grand National?” he inquired.

I said I was sorry I couldn’t make a prophecy; I was not a racing man.

“You don’t ever have presumptions about horses?” he asked darkly.

“A plague on you and your premonitions,” remarked Rathouse, who had put in an appearance, dirty and collarless, heavy with sleep, and fuddled with alcohol. “Archie Reitz, if you and I are going down to Grasfontein, there’s going to be a business-like arrangement hitched up. Things are going to be on a workmanlike basis. And this is what I’m going to say right now. Nobody’s going to put up with you and your fool premonitions.”

We were hurried into breakfast by the womenfolk, Reitz gesticulating excitedly. The bride, I may say, was standing at the table in an overall, cutting slice after slice of dark bread, made of Boer meal ; Mrs. Jeppe, the uncomplaining and tireless, was busy handing round plates heaped with highly-spiced sausages, which she called *Boer worst*. She didn't seem at all surprised to see me ; she never inquired where I had passed the night. All she recognized in me was a hungry man anxious to be fed, and she helped me lavishly to everything on the table. "We must feed up the sprinter," she remarked gravely.

"God, and he can run, too," said Reitz, who was obligingly speaking English, for my benefit alone, since Rathouse and Hoxie could talk Afrikaans like Boers. "I had a presumption he could run whenever I seen him last night. Now, I'm a man to fancy a chap as I fancy a horse : it's first sight or nothing with me. Look at that horse *Paul Pry*. I seen that horse. Beauty. I went home, I went to bed, I closed my eyes, I dreamed. A voice says to me in the dream : 'Just back *Paul Pry*, and you'll know why.' Just like that. So next morning I ups and I backs that horse, for I reckoned, you see, that I'd had a presumption."

"And did you win ? " someone asked.

"Well, man, it was like this," said Reitz apologetically. "I *would* have won, but there had been a *very* good horse entered for that race."

Hoxie guffawed. "Reitz once 'ad a claim down

at Elandsputte that was goin' to make 'is fortune," he grinned. "But the feller in the next claim made the pile instead."

"Yes, and it's always that way with Archie Reitz," said Rathouse. "If he pegs a claim for himself down at Grasfontein, I reckon he'd better swop with the chap next him right away, and then maybe he'll find something. Misses winning a race by one horse; misses winning a fortune by one claim; misses winning the Calcutta Sweep by one number; misses winning a brand new woman by marrying a divorced one! Hell, that's what you might call being born under an unlucky star!"

The bride laughed loudly, and went on eating her breakfast good-naturedly. When the meal was over, the men ambled on to the stoep, and sat there smoking until ten o'clock. I think Rathouse was eager to appear a little more *compos mentis* before facing Mr. Darcy; the others were anxious to be off to town, but he kept delaying and delaying. I did not mind this, however, as I was counting on the old crone ironing a clean shirt for me. She did so, and after pressing my Oxford bags and brushing up my jacket, my appearance caused such consternation that Hoxie suggested I should wear a fancy tie, "and then," said he, "you'll look like one of 'em prize-fighters on parade."

"You leave him alone," said Rathouse, looking at me approvingly. "It's the University touch does it! Fifty down, I'd ask old Darcy for. Fifty down!" He got up and pulled his hat rakishly over one eye.

We all got into the battered old Ford, and commenced careering wildly down the hill, towards the town.

CHAPTER VII

I MEET THE KING OF DIAMONDS

JOHANNESBURG was gay that morning. It is unwise, of course, to take a student from a city such as Edinburgh, dump him down in a forty-year-old mining town, and expect him to be enthusiastic about it. Nevertheless, I saw that enthusiasm was expected of me. Reitz was anxious that I should be impressed; he had never been out of South Africa, and for him an architectural triumph had been achieved in the Town Hall. I admired whole-heartedly the bungalows and houses of the suburbs; but the Town Hall failed, apparently, to produce the desired effect upon me, and I saw that Reitz was disappointed. He immediately consoled himself, however, by joining a party of Communists who were singing rather forlornly at a street corner. Surprised and a little nonplussed over such an unexpected demonstration of socialistic feeling, I asked Rathouse mildly if Reitz was a follower of the Red Flag. To this he replied, dryly, that his brother-in-law was a follower of anything that came along; it was a passion with him to identify himself with any and every public movement that happened to be afoot. During the Rand strike he had narrowly escaped being shot, Hoxie explained,

owing to the fact that he could not be restrained from making impromptu seditious speeches in the public street, and in the cemetery, over the graves of some of the strikers. "Can't keep 'is mouth shut," Hoxie said sadly. "It can be a temp'rance meetin', a Salvation Army meetin', or a communist meetin', or a foon'ral, but it's all the same to 'im."

While Reitz was engaged in expanding his lungs in song, his eye self-consciously gazing heavenward, Rathouse and Hoxie and I entered the nearest bar; that is to say, Rathouse and Hoxie entered the bar, and I followed them. We had not been there very long before Reitz joined us. As Hoxie told me afterwards, one could always count on Reitz's picking one up, if one happened to be going anywhere near a public-house; if one were going home, it was a different matter. Reitz had a great deal to say to the barman that morning about Grasfontein, and after a couple of drinks he had more to say than ever. It was twelve o'clock, or later, before we reached Mr. Darcy's offices. These, I found, were in a fine-looking building, and we ascended to the second floor in a lift. We passed through a sunny room filled with young male clerks, and were admitted into a small apartment occupied by a very distinguished female with Titian hair, who had an extremely efficient manner, and a clear, high voice. She seemed to know Rathouse, and told him that Mr. Darcy *might* see him in half an hour. Mr. Darcy, I gathered, was a very important person.

We waited in that little room until a quarter to one, when Reitz and Hoxie grew restive and strolled

out again. At length the door opened, and a little man like a bird darted out and snatched up his hat, flitting through both rooms and catching the lift by a hair's breadth, as it swept on its downward flight. Behind the little man came a portly, elderly gentleman, wearing a navy blue suit, immaculate linen of pale blue, and dark-brown shoes. His hair was white, and he was clean-shaven, and had very clear, calm grey eyes, and strong but well-cared-for hands. His personality was rather majestic; he was genial, but impressive. Rathouse, I noticed, had sprung to his feet, and was all attention and affability. To be candid, I scarcely recognized my companion in this polished, smooth-spoken man at my side; but I do think I realized, then, how well he had "put it across" me at the Cape.

"Good morning, Mr. Darcy," Rathouse was saying. "I've brought another man along for you, sir. Meet young Mr. Lewis. He's a champion sprinter. I imagine if he's willing to run for you, he ought to be able to peg the spot you want." And he laughed nervously, and twisted his hat round and round in his hands.

Mr. Darcy nodded formally to me.

"You ought to have been at Grasfontein," he said to Rathouse authoritatively. "You don't want to arrive down there at the last minute."

"Going down late doesn't make a bit of difference, Mr. Darcy! *I* don't think it does," said Rathouse philosophically.

"But *I* do! *I* do! And that's the only thing that matters," said Mr. Darcy pontifically. "If

I decide to let—er—Mr. Lewis run for me, you'd better go down to-morrow, and that will give him time for a breathing space before the rush."

Rathouse assured him that he was going down next day. "What I came to see you about is the tents and the gear," he said. "And then, of course, I like to pick my own boys."

Mr. Darcy drummed his neat fingers on the typist's desk, and said impatiently: "Time enough for that when you're at the diggings. If you hadn't suddenly vanished off to Cape Town, you'd have been living very comfortably down at Grasfontein with Shepherd, as manager of my reserve claims, with a salary of twenty-five shillings a day. You don't know when you're well off, Rathouse; that's the trouble with you. It so happens that my claims are worked out, now, and Shepherd is off home, or I shouldn't take you on again. But as you're stranded, you can help me work the claims I want pegged on Friday. This whole business is a gamble, of course. It's about fifty to one that the new claims aren't worth the money it will take to work them; indeed, I didn't intend doing any more digging at Grasfontein, and have sold a lot of my plant. Under the circumstances, I can't afford to give you more than a pound a day, and if you're not satisfied with that, you must go elsewhere."

"Of course, sir," said Rathouse gently, "that little trip to the Cape was unavoidable. A man can't very well desert his brother, Mr. Darcy. My brother was dying, and I had to go. It wasn't as though I were forgetting your interests, either.

I met young Mr. Lewis there. He's an amateur champion sprinter, and he'd just come to South Africa on spec, as it were, after hearing about this rush. So I asked him to come along."

"How is your brother, by the way?" asked Mr. Darcy.

"Buried him on Saturday, at one o'clock," said Rathouse huskily.

I rose and crossed over to the window; I could not trust myself to meet Mr. Darcy's eyes. On Saturday, at one o'clock, Rathouse had been sitting opposite me in a restaurant at Cape Town, lunching handsomely, and discoursing on the flag question and the diamond diggings. I coughed with embarrassment, and looked out into the sun-drenched streets. As I glanced down, I chanced to see, like a fly amid the rest of the traffic, a Baby Austin threading its way skilfully through a maze of five-seater cars, and heavy carts drawn by oxen. I noticed the Baby Austin particularly, because a little Union Jack, about the size of a lady's pocket-handkerchief, was fluttering bravely in front of the bonnet. The car was driven by a girl in white, and she wore a little white slouch hat drawn well down over her brow. As the car came spinning along under the window, I saw her brown hands clutching the wheel, and caught the glitter of the little watch on her left forearm. Then I realized, on a sudden, that Mr. Darcy was speaking to me.

"Come into my room for a moment," he was saying. "I want to talk to you."

Rathouse flashed me a thundery glance as I

followed Mr. Darcy into his private office. I saw that this was a move he had never anticipated, and I determined to take advantage of it. Crook dealing was not in my line; it had never been in my line, and the time had now come when I must take my stand.

"Sit down," said Mr. Darcy genially. "Sit down, and tell me all about yourself, young man." And he opened a cigarette case and passed it along to me.

I helped myself to a cigarette, but as I did so my hand trembled a little. I fancied those hard eyes of Rathouse's were boring right through the door, fixing me with a freezing stare. "There's nothing to tell," I began. "I've had a row with my father, as a matter of fact."

"Good!" said Mr. Darcy breezily. "So you've had a row with your father, young man?" His clear eyes looked into mine. "Well, it does a fellow good to have a row with his dad occasionally. Does his father good, too, I imagine. Don't you think so? Hum!"

I smiled diffidently.

"I'm sure you do!" he exclaimed brightly. "I'm sure you do! When a young man has a row with his father, that's just about the best thing that can happen to him. Show's he's thinking for himself, you see. I don't say he's thinking the *right* thing, mark you! Very often he isn't. But when he finds out he's been in the wrong—well, then, he's learned something. And then the chances are that perhaps he isn't in the wrong, in which case his dad learns something. So, all things con-

sidered, a serious disagreement between father and son is all to the good." And he glanced at me amusedly.

I felt, at that moment, that I could have played the woman to the extent of falling upon Mr. Darcy's neck.

"What is your father?" he asked quickly.

"A Writer to the Signet."

"Ah! And you?"

"I was at the University."

"Cambridge? Oxford?"

"Edinburgh."

"Why did you leave?"

"I was failing in all my examinations."

"Humph! Why did you fail? Why on earth *should* you have failed?"

"I wasted my time," I said bravely.

"How? Girls?" He was smiling again.

I blushed. "Hardly, sir! I—I was writing things."

"What do you call 'things'?" His tone was bantering. "Do you mean poems?"

"I wrote a little verse—sometimes. The usual student stuff. But I was chiefly engaged in writing a novel—or trying to," I confessed.

"And you left the University?"

"Yes."

He looked at me for a few moments in silence. Then: "I'm beginning to think there must be something in you, young man," he said ruminatingly. "Going the recognized way to greatness. All writers—nearly all, that is to say, have left the University. I suppose you know that? But

what makes you call yourself an amateur champion sprinter ? ”

My cheeks burned. “ Rathouse calls me that,” I stammered. “ Really—well, it is very difficult to explain. He made himself very friendly at the Cape, and I asked him to take me to the diamond-fields. But before we had left the train he was introducing me all round as a trained athlete.”

“ And *can* you run ? ”

“ Oh, I took all the best prizes at school for flat racing and the high jump, if that’s much good to you,” I told him. “ And I was Captain of the school cricket eleven.”

“ Yes ? ”

“ And I’m rather keen on fencing.”

He looked at me, a sudden gleam in his eyes. “ Oh, I think you’ll be able to *run*, all right,” he said mischievously. “ But I don’t think writing can possibly be your line. Not with that physique. I think you ought to go to Hollywood, right away.” And he laughed, but not, I can swear, more heartily than I.

“ You don’t believe me ? ” he teased. “ Well, if Byron had been alive to-day, they’d have had him on the films ! But to get down to brass tacks. I suppose your friend James Rathouse has sent you in to ask me for a hundred pounds ? ”

“ He *did* say fifty,” I said apologetically, “ but that is quite out of the question.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because I haven’t come here to rob you, sir.”

He lay back in his chair and laughed. “ Of course you haven’t ! But the labourer is worthy

of his hire, surely? You mustn't be so modest about your capabilities. I *want* you to run for me. I'm satisfied with you. I'll give you twenty-five pounds down now, and twenty-five if you peg the claims I want. And I'll pay you a pound a day to superintend the working of my claims. Rathouse is all right, and Reitz is all right, and little Hoxie is one of the best. But you've got to keep an eye on them for me. I like you, young man, and I trust you. Is it a bargain?"

I had just risen, overwhelmed, to stammer my thanks, when something very wonderful happened. The door opened, and the girl who had been driving the Baby Austin walked into the room.

CHAPTER VIII

I DISCOVER THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

"HALLO, Daddy!" said the girl brightly, "have you seen my flag?" And she put a hand up to her hat, tore it off her head, and threw it across the room. "Come to the window," she commanded, shaking back her short, black hair.

"Shirley," said Mr. Darcy, "this is young Mr. Lewis, who is going to peg a fortune for you down at Grasfontein."

Miss Darcy favoured me with a bow, and a flashing smile.

"Are you a professional sprinter?" she queried eagerly.

"No, but he's by way of being a first-class amateur, I believe," said Mr. Darcy. "And he's a budding author, to boot."

"Oh, what a thrilling person you are!" cried Miss Darcy, smiling. She had a small, neat face, very black, thin brows, and a wide, red mouth. That mouth of hers was never still, I thought. If she wasn't laughing, she was pouting, and when she wasn't pouting, she was darting her tongue round her teeth, and being very saucy. Her eyes were dark and brilliant, and all her movements

were quick, and brimful of energy. She strode over to the window, flung it open, and leaned far over. Her legs, I saw, were unusually long, and extraordinarily shapely; the bulge of the calf was handsome, and tapered down to a beautifully-turned ankle. As she leaned over, just where the hem of her white frock brushed the back of her knee, I caught a glimpse of a scarlet garter.

"Oh, look at this!" she said, leaning farther over than ever, and standing on one leg, with the other raised behind, describing little circles. The sandalled foot wagged impishly. "Two carts have gone by, crowded with natives, and picks and shovels and things, and there are simply dozens of cars flying about, packed with provisions and tents."

She brought her head in for a moment, and her lips parted in a radiant smile. "Oh, aren't you *excited*!" she cried rapturously, and the little head went out again. "Do look at my flag!" she commanded.

Mr. Darcy and I came over and stood by the window, on either side of her. As she continued to wag her leg about, her foot suddenly struck my knee, and she glanced round hurriedly. "Oh, look at me, Daddy, spoiling our sprinter's trousers!" she said apologetically, and in a second she had wheeled about, rubbed the dust off my knee, and was leaning over the window again, whistling. I was so thoroughly embarrassed that I could think of nothing to say; and I stood there, tongue-tied, awkward as any country lout.

"Well, Shirley, that's a good-sized little flag you've got!" said Mr. Darcy pleasantly.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Shirley. (I will call her Shirley, because I never thought of her, from the first day we met, as Miss Darcy.) "Yes, isn't it?" she repeated. "I want people to see it. Especially the Nationalists! The ambition of my life is to give General Hertzog a lift in my car, one of these days." She wagged her foot delightedly, and incidentally came in contact with my trousers for the second time. "Oh, I *am* sorry!" she said contritely, flicking my knee playfully, and added: "You're loyal, aren't you?"

"I hope so," I told her.

"Oh, isn't he Scotch, Daddy?" she squealed. "He *hopes* so! That *is* funny, you know! You *are* funny, Mr. Lewis."

"Am I?" I asked.

This seemed to make her laugh more than ever. Then she said seriously: "You don't think my Baby Austin quite large enough for General Hertzog, do you, Daddy? You see," she explained to me, "I'm doing such wonderful propaganda for England, just now. Tell him, Daddy!"

"Oh, wonderful propaganda!" said Mr. Darcy. "She allows dashing young Dutchmen to take her to the theatre, and if they don't stand to attention for 'God Save the King' at the end of the play, she doesn't allow them to see her home."

"I bet they stand," I said.

"Well, I haven't seen her come home alone yet," Mr. Darcy confessed, blowing his nose.

The foot wagged reflectively, and Shirley laughed softly. Then she sighed. "You know, I'm so excited!" she exclaimed. "I'm thrilled—thrilled to the backbone about this rush! Aren't you, Mr. Lewis? I want to go down to Grasfontein to see it, you know. I'd like to run."

"That I can well believe," said her father heavily.

"But we *are* going, aren't we, Daddy?" she said coaxingly, beginning to hop round the room looking at some of the maps on the walls. "Have you shown Mr. Lewis the map of the reserve claims?"

"He's going to see that, all in good time, Shirley," said Mr. Darcy quietly.

"But this *is* good time!" she expostulated.

"Well, well, perhaps it is," her father assented. "Perhaps it is!" And he produced a triangular-shaped diagram cut into sections with black lines, each section marked with a letter of the alphabet.* There were a number of such divisions and subdivisions, and the whole map was dotted over with black squares and oblongs.

"Now, these black patches are the reserve claims," said Mr. Darcy. "My three claims on L portion have yielded a good harvest. When you go down to Grasfontein, Mr. Lewis, Rathouse will take you over the ground. You'll have to familiarize yourself with it, or you won't know where to run when the time comes. And let me warn you that you'll be somewhat confused at first."

* See map.

"How far will he have to run?" Shirley asked.

"Well, I want claims on L portion," said Mr. Darcy.

"And that will be?" I queried.

"A goodish distance," he admitted. "It's about one and a quarter miles, I believe, to A portion, and that will be your nearest point! And it's anything from four to four and a quarter miles to J, your farthest point. I should think L will be about three miles. Say three, *anyway*."

I gave a low whistle, expanded my chest, and smiled.

"Feeling nervous?" he teased.

"A little," I confessed. "What if I can't get anywhere near the piece of ground you want?"

"Well, that's all in the game," said Mr. Darcy. "Every good digger never grudges another man his luck."

"Oh, doesn't he, Daddy?" said Shirley. "If another man gets my claim, I'm going to be a perfect beast about it! You'll just see! Why, it means my yacht, Mr. Lewis!"

"Your what?" I asked.

"Her yacht," said Mr. Darcy. "Her yacht, bless you! She wants a yacht, the minx! Wants to go cruising round the world, Mr. Lewis. It was an aeroplane, last week; it's a yacht now. I suppose it will be a castle in Spain next."

"No, not that," Shirley assured him. "I don't like Dagos, Mr. Lewis. And those old Spanish castles may reek of garlic. What I really want is a yacht. The *Shirley II*."

"Why *Shirley II*?" her father demanded.

"Well, I'm *Shirley I*," she explained. "One always has to have one's yacht the 'II' something or other. It's the thing, Daddy! It's always done." And she began executing a few little dancing steps. "Oh, aren't you simply *thrilled*?" she asked me.

"No, of course he isn't!" said Mr. Darcy. "Now, why on earth should he be, young lady?"

"He *is* thrilled!" she said defiantly. "Aren't you?" she asked, looking up at me.

"To the marrow," I told her.

"There, now!" she cried, lifting her father's hat off a peg, and cramming it down on his head. "And it's lunch time, now, Daddy. And I'm hungry! I'm simply *starving*! Where's my hat, somebody?"

I picked it off the floor, having discovered it behind a chair in the corner of the room, and handed it to her. She pulled it over her head and down on her brow, and grimaced. "Are you ready?" she asked.

"Quite," said Mr. Darcy, "but let me sign this cheque for Mr. Lewis, first of all. I'm lunching at the Rand Club with a friend. Business engagement. But you young people had better run along where you can hear soft music, and talk nonsense about yachts. And no doubt poor Mr. Lewis will be able to promise that the claims he pegs will be able to pay for a motor launch, at any rate." He rose, smiling, and handed me a cheque for twenty-five pounds. "And twenty-five when the pegging has been done," he said quietly in my ear.

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"Daddy's a wonderful man for signing cheques," said Shirley, plucking my sleeve. Then she dragged me to the window. "Oh, *do* look at my little flag just once again," she cried. "Isn't it lovely?"

CHAPTER IX

WE PREPARE FOR THE GREAT TREK.

MISS SHIRLEY DARCY and I lunched that day at the Carlton. I deposited the lady, first of all, in the lounge of the hotel, dashed over to the booking clerk's office, signed my twenty-five pound cheque, and dispatched a boots round to the Standard Bank to cash it for me. All this I did on the plea that I wanted to 'phone somebody on important business ; and so far as I am aware, Shirley believes that to this day. While the boy was away on the important mission that was going to enable me to pay for lunch, and champagne into the bargain, I rushed Shirley into the lighted lift, and we shot upwards to the dining-hall. We were very excited and jolly, I remember ; but everyone, I think, was keyed up a little. There was a sort of Armistice morning gaiety in the air. Everybody was going down to the diggings ; everybody was coming back a millionaire. The streets swarmed with cars, and the trains to Lichtenburg were packed with prospective diggers, some of whom had gathered there from every quarter of the globe.

Hoxie and Rathouse amused themselves that evening by hanging round Johannesburg station, in order to see off a few of their acquaintances who

left by the 7.20 train. The station, I afterwards heard, was a seething mass of people, shouting, cheering, singing. The platform was crowded with women, bidding farewell to husbands, brothers and sweethearts, who were setting off on their pilgrimage to this great Mecca of treasure-seekers. Mascots were being presented, and the wildest rumours were abroad. Those who knew, declared that Grasfontein was going to be a disappointment, like Elandsputte; others, who knew equally well, prophesied that Grasfontein would prove the richest alluvial diggings ever proclaimed; others, who professed to know better than anyone else, were confident that Welverdiend, which would be thrown open by the Government later on, was the best spot in the Lichtenburg area. I don't know what Rathouse and Hoxie thought, but they appeared to believe a little of everything that they heard. At this time, most people did the same.

Rathouse had given me a very searching, whimsical glance, as I passed through the office with Shirley. Mr. Darcy stayed behind to have a few words with him, and give him final instructions, and as I left them Rathouse shouted to me that I must meet the car at two-thirty at the corner of Pritchard Street. This did not give me as much time with Shirley as I could have wished; but it chanced that she, also, had an appointment. When we had done lunching she drove me to Pritchard Street, and dropped me there. But before she bade me good-bye she opened her purse-bag and handed me a neat little crystal bottle, with a gold top.

"That's for my diamonds," she told me confid-

ingly. "It once held smelling salts, Mr. Lewis, but now I hope it will hold something *very* much nicer."

"Diamonds?" I asked her. "But does one keep diamonds in a bottle?"

"Didn't you know that?" she inquired archly. "It's usually an aspirin bottle, or an old medicine bottle, Mr. Lewis. But I want you to have something really nice!" And she shook my hand, smiling.

"Good-bye," I shouted. "I do hope the diamonds come up to the bottle!" And I put the pretty little trinket in my pocket, and waved her off.

She shouted over her shoulder: "See you . . . Grasfontein . . ." and the little car darted round the corner. Then I crossed the street and joined Rathouse.

"Well, well," said Hoxie pleasantly, "it's the University touch does it, all right, after all." And good-nature beamed from his blue eye as he grinned at me.

"Yes, but what did the old boy give you?" Rathouse enquired. "Not," he added, "that I like to barge in and shatter romance in this crude way. But business is business."

"It isn't always *your* business, though, Jim," Reitz put in. Whereupon Rathouse asked him, somewhat fiercely, what he meant.

"Well, said Reitz, "I reckon if young Lewis is going to run nearly three mile he's going to work for his money."

"I reckon 'e is," said Hoxie.

"And I reckon he is, too," said Rathouse. "But who helped him to the money?"

"The University touch," said Hoxie, winking gleefully at a passing flapper. "That's what done it, Jim Rathouse, an' don't you go kiddin' yourself, neither. An' now we'll 'ave a drink, an' call the deal squared." And he winked at the girl again, out of sheer exuberance of spirit.

I said, then, that I was more than willing to share whatever I had ; that, I argued, was only right. I had received twenty-five pounds, and Rathouse should have half.

But at this, the others protested. I think that Rathouse would have taken half of the money, but he was a little afraid of the other two. After a great deal of argument, however, he professed himself completely satisfied with ten pounds. We then had a drink to settle the matter, and commenced driving round the town, stopping at several big provision stores and purchasing large supplies of *Boer worst*, brawn, tongue, bottled fruits, tinned meats and salmon and sardines, packets of soup, tins of tomatoes, tins of jam, tins of biscuits. We were leaving in the Ford at dawn the following morning, I was told, and it was necessary that we should take as many provisions and as much gear as the old 'bus could carry. We certainly loaded her to the utmost ; when we returned to Reitz's house a tent was added, and several folding camp-beds. In addition to these things we stowed away, somehow and anyhow, a primus stove, a kettle, three saucepans, a coffee-pot, a tea-pot, tin or enamel plates and mugs, some coils of rope, and a tarpaulin. We also took with us two additional picks and three shovels. Mr. Darcy, I was informed, had all the

requisite gear down at the diggings on his reserve claim, and the picks and shovels were to add to the couple of dozen he already owned ; but as it happened, they seemed the last straw to break the back of the camel. We ended by lashing them haphazardly to the back of the hood, where, after Hoxie had negotiated an unusually bad bit of road the following day, one of the business ends of one of the picks came unpleasantly into very close contact with the back of my neck. One learned to accept such little accidents, however, as part of the joy of a digger's life.

We started on the great adventure at daybreak the following morning. One might imagine that men about to set off on a motor-trip of a hundred and seventy-five miles, over appalling roads, would spend the preceding night in slumber. But this was no part of Rathouse's or Hoxie's programme ; and it was not allowed to be any part of mine. The indefatigable Mrs. Jeppe had organized another dance ; or the dance had organized itself. South Africans are tireless people when it comes to entertaining, and so long as they have a gramophone, will dance anywhere and everywhere. I slept on a "shake down" on the stoep that night, but I do not think I closed my eyes until past two o'clock, when Rathouse and Hoxie returned from their little jaunt to the station. Both were in the jovial, talkative stages of inebriation, and Hoxie kept wringing my hands at intervals during the night, wishing me the best of luck, and telling me what a fine fellow I was ; all this, I may add, to the accompaniment of "I'm sitting on top of the world,"

the gramophone record which had proved the hit of the evening, and which was played and re-played and played again and yet again, until I could have cried for mercy.

Mrs. Jeppe's guests behaved in the most amazing way. They ate her cakes, drank her beer and lemonade, strolled under the stars with their sweethearts, vomited heartily on her stoep if they felt so disposed, slept where they pleased, and danced where they pleased. Several girls came and had a look at me as I lay rolled in my blanket, and I was a great deal more embarrassed than they were; indeed they were not embarrassed at all. One of these plump young damsels sat down beside Rathouse and suffered him to put his arm about her; and while he opened her blouse and fondled her breasts she discussed the diggings with him with the calm detachment of a lawyer. Mrs. Jeppe passed and re-passed the stoep while Rathouse and the plump girl were thus engaged, but her gaze was as chill, austere, and impassive, as that of a Rev. Mother. Once, during the evening, I saw Hoxie seize a pretty girl and kiss her amorously, but the onlookers, so far as I could observe, regarded the incident in a perfectly casual and disinterested fashion. All of which was something of a revelation to me.

I was not sorry when dawn came, and the last packages and bundles were heaped on top of the weather-beaten Ford. We breakfasted long before sun-up, and the amazing thing to me was that Rathouse and Hoxie appeared not only fresh, but full of an extremely business-like energy. Our

friend the bridegroom had been sleeping in an adjacent shack, and said good-bye to his bride of two days with less sentiment than I have sometimes permitted myself to show when parting with a maiden aunt. Both Mrs. Jeppe and Mrs. Reitz strolled down to the Ford, and stood waving their hands as we moved away. Hoxie took the wheel, and Rathouse sat beside him, while Reitz and I heroically endeavoured to steady ourselves behind among the tins of meat, ropes, picks, shovels, and other paraphernalia. We were certainly far from comfortable ; but comfort was the last thing, on this occasion, to be taken into consideration.

Hoxie spat significantly on his hands, which were hard as horn, and then pressed the self-starter. Thank heaven, we were off at last !

CHAPTER X

ALL ROADS LEAD TO LICHTENBURG

WE took the Main Reef road past the mines that morning, and by eight o'clock, when the veld was yellow-gold with sun, and the sky a clear ultramarine, we were in Krugersdorp. Roughly speaking, we had by that time covered a distance of forty miles. The roads were choked with traffic; our 'bus was only one in a ceaseless procession of cars of every make, size, and description. Nor was the procession composed of cars alone; there was also a large number of Cape carts, and wagons drawn by oxen, these last crowded with natives and "poor whites," and loaded with gear and machinery. Krugersdorp was all agog. It is an old, straggling town that has outlived its first importance; but every year, on Dingaan's Day, the 16th of December, the Boers foregather there in order to celebrate the victory of the Voortrekkers gained at the battle of Blood River. The main street is quaint; tall old gum trees grow down it on either side. But on this memorable morning one had eyes for little but the traffic. Such traffic, too! One minute we were jolting past a donkey cart heaped with stove, beds, pigeon-coop, and baby's perambulator; a few yards further along we would overtake a Rolls Royce, an

ox-wagon, and a cart drawn by a team of mules, all three standing cheek by jowl with each other. People of every known class and nationality seemed to be abroad, and nobody appeared to have time to notice what anyone else was doing. Hoxie was driving like one inspired ; that blue eye of his was fixed steadfastly on the roadway, and there was a purposeful squareness about the set of his shoulders and back. Like a swallow the crazy old Ford would swerve round a bend and dart in between two cars or carts, skimming by them with no more than a foot of free space on either side. It took the breath away ; the thing was done so neatly, so quickly, and so accurately, that before one had time to protest that Hoxie was about to attempt the impossible, the impossible had been achieved. I am not a nervous man, but there were moments when I was minded to cry out. Sometimes it seemed that a collision was imminent ; Hoxie would blow the horn, a team of mules would shy, there would be a string of oaths, and the car would rush on. . . . All clear, and the mule team a good fifty yards behind ! One breathed again ; and then another blockade of cars and carts had to be negotiated, and yet another and another, until we had left Krugersdorp far behind, and were bumping and dipping along towards the Mooi River.

By this sweet stretch of water, where lovers might dally and grow sentimental, we paused to replenish the radiator before moving on again. The fairest country now lay behind us ; that into which we drove was desolate enough, in all conscience. So far as I observed, there wasn't a sign of a house

or human habitation anywhere; one saw cattle, and occasionally a ploughed field covered with a few straggling mealies, but nothing further. The road, of course, was lively enough. Every now and again we came upon a car standing by the wayside, several perspiring men busy with tyres or engine; but there was no exchange of pleasantries as we passed these casualties. The provincial motorist, in the Old Country, is usually eager to give succour to stricken motorists; the chivalry of the business (if he has just acquired a car for the first time) appeals to him. But on this uncut track, with the prospect of diamonds lying ahead, it was a case of every man for himself, and the devil was permitted to take the hindmost. We must have passed fully thirty broken-down cars and motor-cycles, but it was impossible to offer help; nobody could afford to do that, since time was so precious. Weeks after the rush, those who motored over these same roads, told how they came upon skeleton cars and motor-cycles, stripped of every movable bolt and screw, and abandoned forlornly on the veld, sad souvenirs of that mad charge for wealth that had set the whole of South Africa trekking to Lichtenburg.

Between half-past one and two o'clock, we gained Ventersdorp, a little old Dutch town dumped down in a hollow. Here we halted, in order to give the inner man a little attention. Our tongues were parched, and our faces coated with red dust. Mrs. Jeppe had made up a large consignment of sandwiches for us, and these we ate with appetite, washing them down with beer. As Rathouse re-

moved the tin discs from the top of the beer bottles; and the froth creamed and foamed over the necks, our eyes grew wide with anticipation. I had a thirst that would have done credit to ten men; indeed, we all had. Our nostrils, ears, and throats seemed choked with dust, and from a mask of terra-cotta, Hoxie's and Rathouse's eyes blazed out, a brilliant blue. Rathouse, but for the blue of his eye, looked more like an Indian brave than ever; a couple of feathers stuck in his hair would have completed the picture.

From Ventersdorp we now pushed on for Lichtenburg—a long, tedious journey, over an impossible road, and through barren, deserted-looking country. Mile after mile we covered, with never a tree or a house to break the deadly monotony of the landscape. The number of cars on the veld-track seemed now, if anything, to have increased. It shocked the careful Scot in me to see the way in which some magnificent limousines were being driven ruthlessly over the broken road. The average South African treats his car worse than he treats his horse or his mule; and that is saying something. One man, driving a brand-new saloon car, went tearing along at the rate of forty miles an hour, careering up on the bank in a wild endeavour to get ahead of each car in front of him, and then see-sawing down again. The insanity of the performance goaded Hoxie to profanity; he swore with a thoroughness and proficiency seldom excelled even in the fo'castle. "An' what the 'ell d'ye think ye're doin', anyway?" he concluded. "Loopin' the loop?"

"Take that confounded heap of scrap-iron out of the way!" the driver of the saloon car bellowed.

"D'you want your blasted balloon tyres blown to blazes?" Rathouse howled back threateningly; and this mutual exchange of compliments concluded, the saloon car fell behind a little. The driver was a foppishly-dressed man, with glasses, and he had one passenger—a stout, middle-aged blonde, very gaily attired, and wearing a red hat. It chanced that we met the lady afterwards, as you shall hear; she was destined to play an important part in my adventure.

Miles out of Lichtenburg, an unforeseen disaster befell us; we ran short of petrol. This served to put my three friends in bad odour with one another. Rathouse and Reitz became vituperative and cursed Hoxie roundly; but Hoxie declared the negligence to be theirs. "Are ye the Prince of Wales, an' am I the choffer?" he asked politely of Reitz. To this, Reitz replied that it was the driver's business to see to the petrol supply, and appealed to me to support him in his argument. But happily, this was not necessary. While the altercation had been at its height, I had sighted a tiny shack by the wayside, and beside it a signboard, bearing the legend: "Shell." The enterprising individual who had put up this little hut, in anticipation of the rush, supplied us with a gallon of petrol for the sum of four shillings and sixpence; but in that God-forsaken stretch of arid wilderness, petrol, at any price, would have been cheap.

A little tired and out of temper, we started off again, and presently passed a gateway that Hoxie

took to be the entrance to the Town Commonage. His surmise proved incorrect ; but one cannot blame him for being somewhat confused. These Town Commonages round Dutch dorps strike the stranger as being really funny, in their immensity. When the early Voortrekkers built their little dorps, they left a large tract of land outside, enclosed by a boundary fence, where oxen could be out-spanned ; and as one could get a farm of thousands of morgen for a case of gin, in those days, they did not stint themselves where the size of the Town Commonage was concerned. Later on we passed the Lichtenburg Town Commonage gate proper, but it seemed to be as much as nine miles away from the town ; although that, of course, is merely a wild calculation on my part. About three in the afternoon, I remember, we glimpsed some houses and trees, and presently we were into the little dorp itself. South African dorps always seem to spring upon the traveller out of nowhere ; one sees no sign of smoke ; there is no preliminary warning that a town is at hand. One minute you are driving along what seems limitless barren waste. Next minute, the car has rounded a bend and ascended a hill, and a whole town lies spread out at one's feet.

I can best describe Lichtenburg as a little back-water town suddenly awakened from a Rip Van Winkle-like slumber, to find itself overwhelmed with modernity. The town square was absolutely *choc à bloc* with cars, that seemed moving about in every conceivable direction. The babel of noise was terrific, and the filling stations were doing record business. Never, in all my life, have I

beheld such an assortment of vehicles and people as I saw assembled there ; every known make of car was flying around, piled high with machinery, sieves, picks, shovels, tarpaulins and ropes. There were cars from Griqualand West, the Orange Free State, the Northern Transvaal, and Rhodesia ; and in regard to the people, I should say that they were representative of all classes and conditions, from the Zambesi downwards. One saw patriarchal-looking Dutchmen with long white beards walking down the old streets, rubbing shoulders with smart young motorists in motor-coats, and adventurous women in riding-breeches. The hotels were packed ; the houses were packed ; the stables and garages were packed. The most fantastic prices were being asked and paid for accommodation. Lichtenburg was on everybody's lips throughout the length and breadth of South Africa, and the little dorp was becoming drunk with prosperity.

We paused here to have some more beer, and get our Claim Certificates, but there was a notice pinned up to the effect that these were to be obtained at Grasfontein. Accordingly, we halted for ten minutes only, and then pushed on again. The congestion of traffic was by this time quite indescribable, and we tore along a road through columns of red dust. It was now past three o'clock, and a brilliant but merciless sun was beating down on us. We were smothered in fine, red sand from head to heels ; the car was full of it, the provisions were covered with it. One couldn't see for dust, one couldn't breathe for dust ; each car that passed set up another cloud of it, and added a fresh layer

on top of us. The countryside struck me as being particularly barren ; very, very little rain falls there, I believe, and I do not think that a morgen of ground would keep a donkey alive.

Presently we topped a rise, and suddenly the whole panorama of the diggings was unfolded before us. The magnitude of this scene beggars all description. On either hand, and as far as the eye could see, Mother Earth was seared and gashed by hundreds of thousands of tiny pits, each pit having flung up its little pyramid of red soil. Here and there and everywhere, for miles and miles, were dotted little tin shacks and tents ; the light was striking the iron roofs, and they glistened as though burnished, in the bright sun. Mounds of earth, and blue sky, and tin shacks ; tin shacks, and blue sky, and mounds of earth. Mile upon mile. Mile upon mile. It was a sight that made a man catch his breath ; it was a spectacle that made him stand and gasp. Not a tree on the landscape ; not a blade of grass. Nothing but earth—hard, stony earth, earth from whose red heart thousands and thousands of pounds' worth of diamonds was being torn.

"Grasfontein," said Hoxie, and pointed, while the others gave a hoarse, throaty cheer.

We had arrived !

CHAPTER XI

PRELUDE

WE spent the remainder of that afternoon roaming about Grasfontein, taking stock of our surroundings. The place was familiar to Rathouse, Reitz, and Hoxie, but to me it was bewilderingly strange ; I felt that I was walking in a dream, or had strayed into a tale from the "Arabian Nights." Any spectacle more bizarre than that which I now witnessed it would be impossible for the imagination to conjure up ; some fifty to sixty thousand people were encamped there, gipsying together on an immense stretch of ground that, to my mind, resembled nothing so much as the battlefields of the Somme. Whereas the Somme battlefields are a chill grey-white, however, the Lichtenburg diamond fields are a vivid red. But apart from this, the likeness between the shell-holes of the Somme and the pot-holes of Lichtenburg is remarkable. The ground in places looked as though it had been tunnelled by a vast army of giant moles, and the battlefield aspect was heightened by the appearance of the tin shanties. My three friends were eager to find a few old companions, but looking for one's acquaintances in that confusion of tents, huts,

and machinery, was like looking for a needle in a haystack.

To add to the general disorder and chaos—if that were possible—landmarks kept moving. One memorized the position of a certain hut only to return an hour later, perhaps, and find it gone. It was no unusual thing to meet a buck wagon, drawn by oxen, an entire house on top of it. A little township had sprung up like a mushroom; whole streets had been built in a day. These, for the most part, were named after the principal streets of Johannesburg. There was Pritchard Street, an “alleged” road, with tin shanties on either side; there was Commissioner Street; there was Eloff Street. All these roads were pitted with holes, and transport was no easy matter; nevertheless, lorries carrying enormous tanks, each containing anything from forty to eighty gallons of water, went tearing up and down them all day. Eloff Street was near a water supply, and there I once encountered an elephant from the circus, which had been pressed into the transport service. This sounds the wildest fiction; but it is sober fact. Fantastic as it may appear, we had a circus at the diggings, a Big Wheel that every digger will remember as a famous landmark, at least three merry-go-rounds, and several picture houses or “bioscopes,” as South Africans call them. In addition to these attractions, we had innumerable cafés, some of which ran, to say the least of it, the most remarkable cabaret entertainments I have ever witnessed.

It was typical of my companions that instead of

unpacking the gear, and putting up the tent for the night, they wandered about the diggings until six o'clock, patronizing the merry-go-rounds, and conversing with other diggers. They would stroll leisurely up to a claim where operations were in progress, and become ecstatic over the quality of the gravel being thrown up ; and presently they would get into conversation with the overseer. In a most nonchalant manner this man would then produce a little medicine bottle, and shake one or two dozen diamonds into his thick, dirty hand, rattling them about like so many pieces of glass. But, indeed, they looked exactly like pieces of glass—glass that has become soiled and discoloured. Some finds were very poor ; others, again, were extremely promising, and the spirits of my three friends rose steadily hour by hour.

We dined that evening on L portion, at a restaurant in Eloff Street. This little café was a tin shanty, with an earthen floor, a few tables being scattered here and there. The proprietor, who looked like a Greek, was not a little amused when I asked if it would be possible for me to have a wash, a request, I may add, that caused all who had overheard me to burst into the most side-splitting laughter. The Greek suggested supplying me with six bottles of soda-water, and this provoked more merriment than ever. Reitz and Rathouse were not anxious to wash ; a thick coating of dust did not discomfort them in the slightest. But little Hoxie, who had a respect for his appearance at all times, followed me round to the back of the shack, where digging operations were going for-

ward, and the diggers were busily engaged in "washing." As a favour, they sold us half a bucket of water, and with this we managed to scrape the grime from our faces and necks. When we returned to the café, Rathouse and Reitz were already half-way through the menu, and two ladies were sitting at meat with them.

"Gee!" cried Hoxie, advancing zestfully.

"Who's the good-looker?" demanded one of the women, glancing up. I recognized her instantly; the red hat and the blonde hair were unmistakable. At the same moment, the other woman turned, and threw her head back, with a gay, quick movement, smiling challengingly. I had seen that smile before, somewhere. . . . I have a remarkable memory for faces. But on this occasion Hoxie had the better of me, for, while I was pondering the problem of the girl's identity, he had already darted forward.

"You're the li'l girl I seen under a Joh'burg street lamp two nights ago!" he exclaimed joyfully.

"Yes, but who's the good-looker?" said the red-hatted blonde, pointing a fork at me.

"You get on with your chicken, Anita," said the little dark girl, smiling in my direction.

"One chicken's enough at a time," said Rathouse. "Leave our sprinter alone. We don't want him in hospital."

The Greek, and several other men in the café, guffawed loudly.

"Lewis is bashful," said Rathouse. "Come here, Lewis! This is Anita, and this is Billie. Lewis is the kind of fellow who likes to be intro-

duced, you know. What's your other name, peach?" He nudged the little dark girl with his elbow.

"Schonberg," said the little girl.

"Miss Billie Schonberg! Meet Mr. Lewis," said Rathouse gallantly.

"No, meet *me*!" cried Hoxie.

"I reckon she'd sooner meet Johnny Walker," Reitz remarked, his mouth full of mutton chop.

"Is he coming?" Anita inquired.

Rathouse bent down and produced a whisky bottle from under the table. "This place is like the States; you bring your own hooch along with you," he observed. He took a pocket-knife from his pocket, pulled open the corkscrew that was fitted to it, drew the cork from the bottle, and began pouring whisky into the little dark girl's glass. "Say when, baby," he breathed in her ear.

"Hold!" cried Billie, fingering the tumbler with her little doll-like hands, the nails like varnished pink sea-shells. She edged closer to Reitz and wrinkled her nose.

"Oh, don't waste no time on '*im*!' " said Hoxie, who was noisily masticating a piece of tough steak. "'E's married, 'e is."

"I adore married men! They are so susceptible!" said Anita, taking a puff from her bag, and dabbing her face liberally with a pinkish-coloured powder.

"How do you figure that out?" asked Rathouse insinuatingly.

"If they ain't susceptible they don't get married!" said Anita.

"That's sound theory, that is," said Reitz, admiringly.

"She isn't talking theoretically," said Rathouse dryly.

"What's she talkin', then?" Hoxie inquired.

"Professionally," said Rathouse, and put his tongue out.

There was a roar of laughter, and Anita, with perfect good humour, dabbed Rathouse's face with powder and then dropped the puff into her bag. "What's the programme?" she asked, clicking the fastening of the bag together with a loud snap.

"Swing-boats and hobby-horses," said Reitz, who was picking his teeth with a match. "And then a dance."

"I want my fortune told," said Billie, and puffed a cloud of smoke into my face.

"I'll tell you your fortune! You're all going to be robbed in a minute," said Rathouse, and then called out to the proprietor: "What's the damage, Ikey?"

The meal concluded, and the bill settled, we all sauntered out into the cool night air. It was now after seven o'clock, and quite dark; tents were being pitched everywhere, and hundreds of primus stoves were roaring cheerfully. We went round the various amusements, but at ten o'clock, when someone proposed that we should all have a dance in one of the cabarets, I left the party, and returned to A portion, where we had left the car. It was too dark to worry about putting up the tent; I dragged forth a canvas stretcher bed

from the rest of the baggage, wrapped myself in an army blanket, and went to sleep under the stars. I slept like a log ; this was the first sound sleep I had enjoyed for weeks, and I never stirred until six.

The South African dawn is always cold. When I awoke next morning, I found my three friends in camp beds beside me, each of us with his blanket drenched with dew. There is something about South African cold that freezes the marrow in one's bones ; it is a dry, cruel, cutting cold, invigorating enough when the blood has become heated, but paralyzing in the early hours, before sun-up. One realized what British troops had to contend with during the Boer War, grilled by a blistering sun in the day-time, and frozen under the cold stars at night. Seasoned South Africans never appear to feel either intense heat or intense cold. I do not think that my companions would have felt too warm at the Equator, or too cold at the North Pole. They were weather-proof, and tough as leather.

I passed the forenoon of that day in the company of Rathouse, walking over the L portion section, and trying to familiarise myself with the landmarks near Mr. Darcy's old claims. This was an unbelievably difficult task ; I would walk for about twenty yards, turn round, look back, walk for another twenty, turn and look again, walk again, turn again, and so on, until I felt certain of my sense of direction, or very nearly so. It is extraordinary how different a place can look, once one has strolled a few paces away from it. I was perhaps over-conscientious

about the duty assigned to me, but I was anxious to perform it well. By noon, I thought I had got the topography of the diggings fairly well imprinted in my memory. Grasfontein, as I heard one man say, is shaped rather like a ham; imagine the larger end to be the South, with the knuckle for the North. On the day of the rush, the long line of runners, equalling the field in length, was to advance and surge across it from the East.

After a hasty lunch of bully beef, tea, and biscuits, we all four of us set out to Treasure Trove, where the Diggers' Committee was issuing diggers' certificates. The little shack in which the Committee sat had a Union Jack hoisted on top of it, and a queue of some two or three hundred diggers stretched from the door of the shanty, making a long, straggling tail behind. I had to wait, in gruelling heat, for a couple of hours, until my turn came and I secured my Digger's Certificate; and this document in my possession, I had then to wait a further three hours at another shanty, in order to get two Claim Licences—one for myself, and one for Shirley. In my dreams, that night, I was receiving certificates and pegging claims. I dreamed I was the giant of fable who owned the seven-league boots, and was on the point of running down the Mall, and pegging a claim in front of St. James's Palace, when I was rudely awakened by Hoxie, who had been amusing himself by sprinkling the dregs of the contents of a billy-can over my face. It was seven o'clock, and I was thrown into the wildest consternation on being informed by him that we were all to be off the diggings and on to the

neutral zone by eight o'clock, or thereabouts. The reason for my distress was that Mr. Darcy and his daughter were to arrive at Grasfontein that morning, and I was desperately set upon shaving.

I might have spared myself the inconvenience of boiling water on a primus, and trying to shave before a scrap of mirror about eight inches in diameter, and cracked across the centre ; du Toit turned up with the bad news that Mr. Darcy had been unavoidably detained, and that neither he nor Shirley would be present at the rush. This had the effect of making us all feel a trifle flat ; but everything, apparently, was destined to fall flat on that day. Prospective diggers lined up, fully seventeen thousand strong, in readiness to run after the signal had been given ; but, twenty minutes before the appointed time for the rush, a stembok came out of its little hole in the veld, and several diggers darted forward to catch it. Perceiving the line broken, other runners, keyed up to an incredible pitch of excitement, mistook this for the authentic signal, and started off ; and before those in authority realized what was happening, an illegal rush was in full swing.

I commenced to run with the others, but before I had covered three-quarters of a mile, a mounted policeman came charging alongside me, shouting : "Stop ! Stop ! Illegal rush !" Much to the annoyance of du Toit, I turned back ; he was all of the opinion that, like most of the other runners, I ought to have ignored the police, and pressed forward. We had a heated argument about the matter that might have ended in much unpleasant-

ness on his part, had not evening seen the tables completely turned. It rained that night, I remember, and while we huddled inside our miserable tent, and an icy wind swept the diggings, a troop of armed police splashed down the wretched streets and began wending its way towards the point where hundreds upon hundreds of claims had been pegged. It says much for the good temper of the diggers that, practically without a murmur, they permitted the demolition of their day's work. Practically, I say. I am not forgetting our friend Archibald Reitz, who was anxious to draw up a petition, head a deputation, and start a revolution. With the greatest difficulty we soothed him down ; but after holding forth for two hours, he at length attempted to drown his sorrow in alcohol, and finally went to sleep in my arms, sobbing hysterically, and calling me " Clara."

CHAPTER XII

I PEG A CLAIM

WE now had to put in two weeks of idleness until the fourth of March dawned at last—the day which saw the greatest and most spectacular diamond rush in history. Those two weeks were irksome for me ; I got tired of doing nothing. But my companions appeared to thrive on idleness. Reitz went home to his wife, du Toit stayed with some friends at Mafeking, and Rathouse and Hoxie played cards, got drunk occasionally, and knocked about the diggings with women. I passed the days writing up my diary, and taking little jaunts about the countryside. There was, of course, plenty to see. But I was more than thankful when the waiting period was over.

It had been thought that owing to the pitiful muddle and disappointment in which the illegal rush had terminated, the number of diggers taking part in the rush proper might be considerably less than on the first occasion. But the number of cars which streamed into Lichtenburg on the days preceding the second rush soon dispelled this belief. The little dorp was utterly besieged ; I can use no other expression that seems to describe its condition so aptly. Trains arrived from Johannesburg and

other parts of the Union absolutely packed with prospective diggers. Whereas seventeen thousand men lined up and ran in the first rush, no fewer than twenty-seven thousand ran in the second. News of the first rush had evidently acted as so much "boost" for Grasfontein, and the number of runners, thereby, was increased by ten thousand. The amount of traffic that poured into Lichtenburg, and thence to the diggings was, without exaggeration, stupendous. There were cars everywhere; big cars, little cars, old cars, new cars. And there were donkey-carts and ox-wagons by the thousand. Everybody was in the best of spirits, and every man of us, although outwardly trying to appear calm, was strung up to the highest pitch.

We rose at sunrise on that eventful, glorious morning; the whole district was astir then. I breakfasted off a couple of bananas and an orange, had a brisk, short run, and massaged my limbs until the skin glowed. On this occasion, I didn't worry about shaving; we none of us did. I was in excellent form, but to be quite candid, the crowd of trained athletes strolling around the ground made me feel a trifle nervous. Most of us wore singlets and running shorts, but there were a few men in football garb, and a number in swimming costume. In addition to those I have just mentioned, there were of course hundreds who ran in thick, heavy trousers. One saw men of every class and condition imaginable, and dozens of impecunious students from the Universities had gathered there in the hope of securing good claims and selling them. To some members of the community the

rush, one could see, was merely a tremendous piece of good fun ; but to others, it was all too tragically earnest.

We trekked off the diggings to the neutral zone in our thousands that morning, and the police went over the ground "combing" out all stragglers with a thoroughness that won every good digger's admiration. No fewer than fifty men, I may say, were found skulking in the forbidden area, and one of them had gone so far as to peg a claim. All those discovered in hiding were promptly arrested, and one fellow, who attempted to feign drunkenness, was stripped and tied to his bed. At seven o'clock the Union Jack was hoisted on a flag-staff planted two hundred yards from the line, at a height at which it could be seen by every runner participating in the rush ; and at half-past eight, all traffic proceeding to the diggings was held up.

I had been looking eagerly for Mr. Darcy and Shirley since dawn, and at ten o'clock, when nearly fifty thousand runners and sightseers were behind the line, which extended for over three thousand yards, I came upon them when I had almost given up hope of finding them, using their car as a sort of grand stand. The police had allowed all cars to be drawn up about thirty yards behind the runners, but to obviate any danger of their starting up to follow the diggers after the flag had dropped, bonnets were turned inward. I found Shirley, clad in riding-breeches and khaki shirt, sitting on top of a saloon car busy with a pair of binoculars. Her father was the first to catch sight of me. "Hi, there," he said to her pleasantly, "don't bore your

eyes out looking for what is just under your nose, my dear." And he wrung me warmly by the hand.

She looked down quickly, and gave a little squeal of delight. "Oh, good morning!" she cried. "I'm so thrilled I feel I shall bust! Don't you?"

I asked her, teasingly, what there was to get excited about. "Is the flag big enough for you, do you think?" I inquired banteringly.

"She's under the impression they've hoisted it in honour of her birthday," Mr. Darcy remarked.

"Many, many happy returns of the day," I said, smiling up at her.

"Thank you," she said, "but *you've* got to make the returns for me, remember, by pegging me a nice, rich little claim, Mr. Lewis."

"I'll try to," I told her.

She vaulted off the roof of the car, and catching hold of me, swung me round, and looked at the quiver arrangement I had ingeniously strapped on my back to contain the eight iron pegs which were to mark her claim and mine.

"Ain't he like Cupid, miss, in them little pants, with arrers on 'is back, all complete," said Hoxie, who had just ambled up with Reitz and Rathouse and du Toit. "What you want now, Miss Darcy, is a red-white-and-blue bow round his neck."

"He can have the little flag off Daddy's car," she said, snatching a Union Jack off the bonnet of the limousine, and thrusting it into my quiver. "There, now, we shall be able to pick him out easily, when our car follows up. I've got champagne in the car, you know," she informed me, "and I'm going to break a bottle of wine over my claim."

"Just in case she never gets the opportunity of breaking it over her yacht, Mr. Lewis," her father explained. "A precautionary measure, in other words." He sighed. "Well, this is a great sight," he said impressively. "I've seen Royal Ascot, and the Derby, and the opening of the Wembley Exhibition, but never a spectacle to equal this! And it's good to see the old flag waving away up there! Your Dutch Government may rush this Flag Bill through, Mr. du Toit, but the biggest diamond rush in history is going to take place under the Union Jack. God bless it!" And he gave me a hearty smack on the back.

"If you people expend much more energy on patriotic speeches you won't have any left for this business on hand," said du Toit, smiling sardonically.

"We're only getting properly wound up," said Shirley saucily, and thrust a flask into my hand. "That's brandy," she said practically. "When you're feeling fagged, you must just take a swig, and push on. Oh, and I've got some lemons for you!" She dived into the back of the car, reappeared with two lemons, and cut them in half with a penknife. "You rub these on your face when you get overheated," she explained, and I slipped two halves into each of my trousers pockets. Rathouse, Reitz, and Hoxie were making their own preparations, but they did not wish, they said, to bother about lemons. Whisky, they thought, was good enough.

The dense crowd behind the line was now increasing every minute. One saw the strangest sights. An old backvelder Dutchman, wearing

veldschoen and a coarse blue blouse, was seated nonchalantly in a luxurious limousine, smoking a clay pipe, in the company of his painted, fashionable daughters. At least four to five thousand cars, I should say, were lined up and parked, one behind the other. The orderliness of the whole scene was amazing. Rathouse, Reitz, Hoxie and I now shook hands with Shirley, Mr. Darcy, and du Toit, and leaving them, took our place in the line of runners. I was in a most fortunate position, being a little to the right of the Union Jack, but the number of runners at this portion of the line was about fourteen deep before the time was up. As it happened, I managed to stand right in front.

It was a marvellous sight, looking to right and left of that three thousand yards' stretch, marked at intervals by small flags. Patrolling the line, the sun flashing on them bravely, were two hundred mounted police, and a trooper or two would dash up and charge the crowd whenever some of the waiting runners grew restive. Towards eleven o'clock a portion of the crowd became unruly, but order was enforced, and shortly before twelve, when the Mining Commissioner drove out in his car to the flag-staff, there was a complete lull, such as takes place during the two minutes' silence on Armistice Day. Two of the three cords which held the flag-staff fastened to a pole driven into the ground, were severed, and while every man of us stood motionless, the proclamation was read. There was a breathless, ominous hush, that set my pulses racing. Then suddenly the flag dropped. As I saw that vivid splash of colour descend from

the blazing blue of the sky, there was a mighty roar of thousands of voices, and the whole line surged forward in one solid mass.

Imagine that gigantic army of runners streaming across the veld ; middle-aged men, young men, men with white beards, men with wooden legs. It was the craziest and most wonderful sight I have ever seen. I, Talbot John Lewis, a sober youth of the city of Edinburgh, was tearing over boulders and stones like a mad creature, every muscle strained to its utmost. For the first mile or so, I attempted to go easily, but there was little use trying to set a pace for oneself on that field ; one simply had to run anyhow, jumping pits, leaping mounds of earth, one's eyes on the ground all the time, on the look-out for suitable foot-holds. My experience of the first rush had taught me to wear boots instead of shoes, as a protection to the ankles, but even with the boots laced tight I felt my ankles all but twisting, several times. At A portion, having covered a mile and a half, I flung myself down, and smeared my face with lemon. The perspiration was pouring off me in a steady stream, and my heart was pounding. Thousands of runners had already commenced to peg on this A section, but the mob was still driving on, panting, gasping, shouting. I gulped down some brandy, sprang to my feet, and began running again, trying this time to increase the pace. At about two and a half miles, however, having covered another mile, a horrible thing happened to me ; I found I was lost. Try as I might, I could not get my bearings anywhere, and time was precious—oh ! so precious.

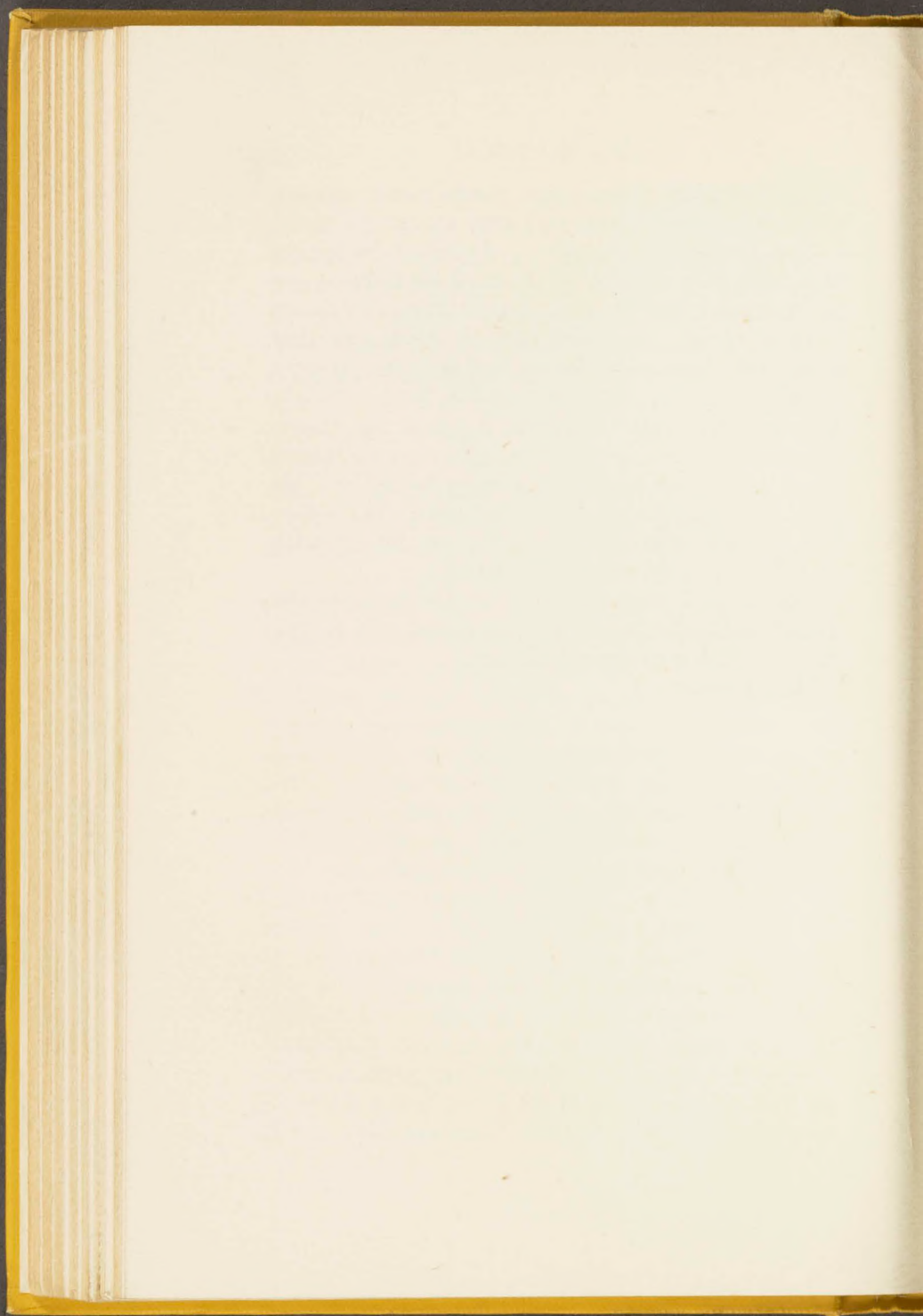
I thought I should never reach L portion, and my anxiety drove me to a kind of frenzy. I went tearing hither and thither, trying to find my way, miserably conscious, while I did so, that every moment counted. At length, after a second mouthful of brandy, and a short rest, I managed in some degree to recognize a few familiar landmarks. This caused me to throw every ounce of my strength into making a supreme effort, and half-blind with exhaustion, my singlet and pants sodden with sweat, and clinging to my skin, I made a final spurt and reached the spot on L portion adjoining Mr. Darcy's old claim.

Taking a large stone, I drove in my first peg, my face dripping with perspiration. Then I began to walk, counting one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. Fifteen paces. I halted, and drove in my second peg. I was dimly aware that another man was pegging somewhere in the vicinity, but I went on in a sort of hazy dream. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. Third peg! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. Fourth peg! I stood up, then, staggering, and noticed, dazedly, that a runner in a blue bathing suit was beside me, and had driven one of his pegs right in the centre of my claim. For an instant, I suddenly saw red, and then all I knew was that I was charging him, full tilt, like an infuriated bull. He was a sturdy, thick-set little fellow, and he came at me, head lowered. We closed instantly, and he

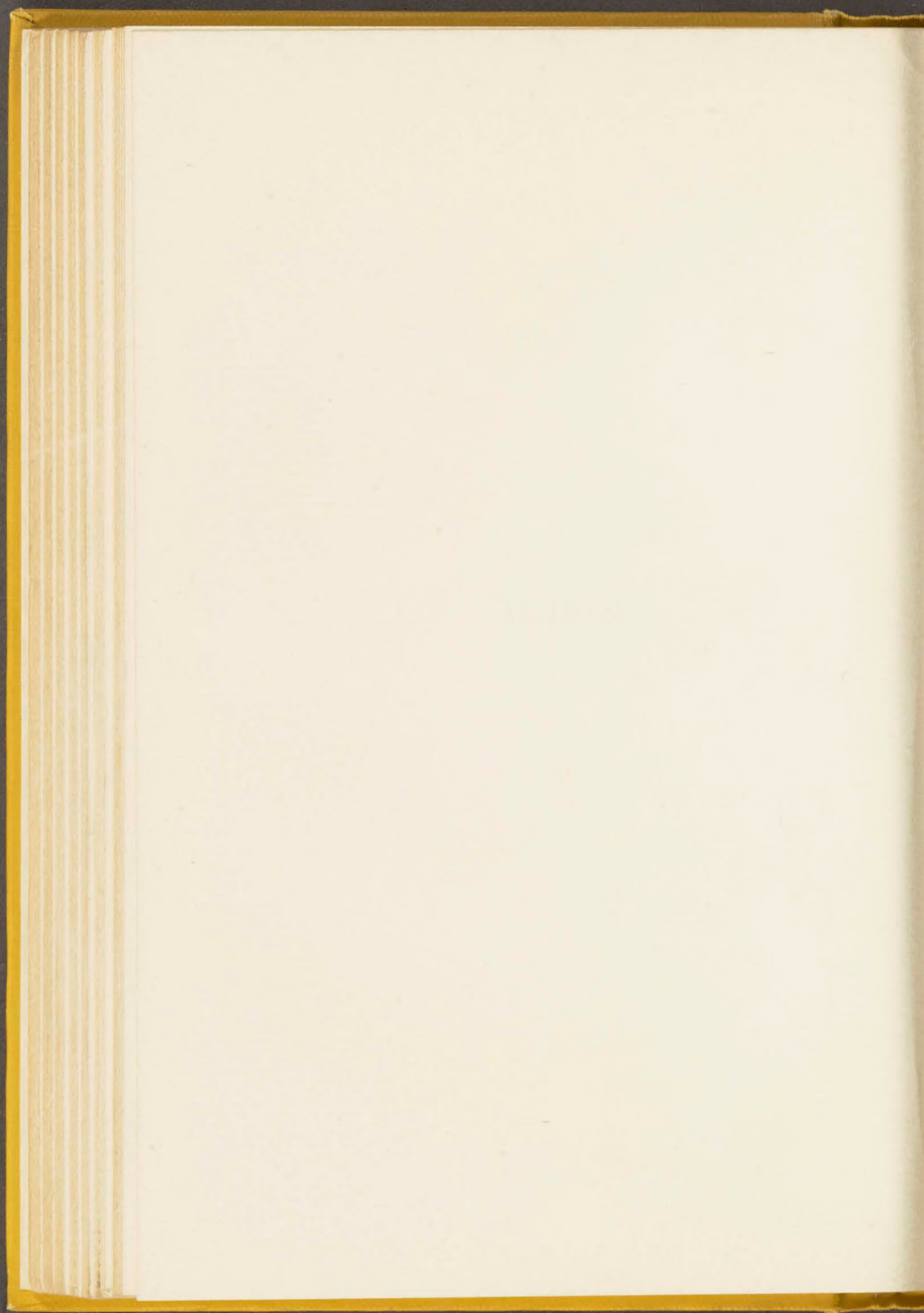
began inflicting some cruel punishment, raining blow after blow on my tortured, exhausted body, so that I sobbed with agony. At length he sprang back, and gave me the full force of his right on my cheek, closing my left eye, and causing my nostrils to spurt blood. I do not care to think how that scrap might have ended for me, had not my opponent tripped on a boulder ; but as his foot struck a stone and he tilted backward, I seized my opportunity, and with a superhuman effort my right shot out, with the full force of my body behind it. He reeled a little, and tried to steady himself for another rush, but I caught him a neat tap on the jaw with my left, and he dropped like a stone.

That is all I remember, for at this juncture the ground suddenly began to spin round and round, and the earth rose up and hit me.

I had fainted.



PART II



CHAPTER XIII

SHIRLEY FIRES THE FIRST SHOT

I REGAINED consciousness to find a great buzzing in my ears, and hear a far-away voice say, quite distinctly: "It's *his* claim, all right. I saw him peg it."

"Fellow came up an' started peggin' right in the centre of 'is claim," said another voice. "I seen that, too."

"I seen it, and I reckon the other chap was there before him. See?" This voice was threatening.

"You're a liar," said the first voice calmly.

"A bloody liar," said the second, vehemently.

"Yes, I *did* peg my claim," I struggled to say, and then tried to sit up.

"There 'e is! Right's a trivet!" said the second voice, and opening my one eye (my other remained closed for many hours) I found myself looking into the kindly, familiar face of Hoxie. "That wasn't 'alf a bad run," he said comfortingly. "I wasn't so far be'ind ye, neither. I kept up pretty decent. Then I lost ye, an' I couldn't see ye nowhere. An' then I saw ye again. But as I come up, curse me if that blighter wasn't peggin' right inside your claim." He wiped my face with

a filthy handkerchief. "Ye've pegged for 'er?" he queried.

I nodded.

"Ye ain't pegged for yourself, yet?"

I reached out for my quiver. "Well, I'd better peg now," I told him. "Anywhere. It doesn't really matter. I've hardly a bean to work a claim, so what's the use?"

"My God! There's optimism for you!" somebody remarked. I looked up, and saw that it was a tall man who spoke, the man whose voice I had first heard when coming out of my swoon. "I've got thirty shillings, young fellow! Thirty shillings! And I've dined with princes, and owned sixty race-horses in my time. It's a wonderful life!" He laughed. "I'm just going to sit around here and wait until you fellows work your claims, and if your luck's in, I'll raise the money to work mine."

"Who's feedin' you, mate?" asked Hoxie.

"You, I hope, comrade," said the tall man. He had rather an ascetic face, and long, lean limbs. "My name's Percy," he said blandly.

"Percy what?" asked Hoxie.

"Nigel Percy. You'll find me in 'Who's Who.'"

"Gee," said Hoxie, "you may be in 'Who's Who,' but on them diggings you'll soon see what's what." He took my pegs from me, and we wandered down together to a vacant piece of ground, where I pegged my second claim. "What d'yer think of our new friend?" he inquired, as I measured off fifteen feet.

"He looks all right."

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"Oh, that kind that dines with princes always does," he said philosophically. "It's what their pockets is like that ye've got to watch. You'll see what this diggins will be into in a few weeks' time. Every digger broke, an' them that ain't 'avin' to 'and out their tin in charity. I seen it scores of times. You mark them words of mine."

We paused on our way back to the spot where I had pegged the first claim to ask a little knot of men, who were grouped about a small portion of ground, if anything was the matter.

"Seen the corpse?" said one.

"Whose?" Hoxie asked curiously.

"Bloke 'ere," a man said affably. "Pegged 'is claim, an' pegged out."

"Is the man dead?" I broke in, peering over several shoulders, and catching a glimpse of a pair of running shorts, and a blue jersey.

"Dead? He'll never dig for diamonds no more, that chap won't," said a digger heartily. "Fell down, and his heart bust. Dutch, he is. I was running with him. I was pegging right beside him, here, and I cried out to him, friendly-like: 'Have you pegged, Andries?' And God! before I realised what was happening, he called out: '*Ek is klaar!*' And there he was, gone to glory."

I walked away, considerably chastened in spirit.

"Don't take no notice of them things," said Hoxie cheerfully. "Before the soil on this diggins 'as all been turned up, you'll see a corpse or two, all right. Ye'll be workin' alongside a chap, an' damn it, man, if 'e won't go be'ind the tent an' blow 'is 'ead off! I seen them comin' 'ungry as

wolves round the door, down an' out—out to the last ticky. An' if ye don't give 'em five bob, they'll dec'rate your stoep with their brains, just out of spite, they will."

I had pegged Shirley's claim on a raised portion of ground, and we returned thither, and sat down, our new friend, Nigel Percy, joining us. It was a great sight gazing over that vast field of torn earth, sprinkled with human beings rushing here and there frenziedly like a gigantic colony of ants disturbed by the kick of a giant's boot. There were free fights going on by the score. Some of the reserve claims, which had not yet been worked, and which were only marked by white-washed stones, were causing half of the trouble. A few unfortunate runners who believed they had pegged good claims would suddenly be informed they were in the reserve ; there would be arguments, and the matter not infrequently ended in blows. Some claims, I am bound to confess, were pegged in the most haphazard fashion ; an unprincipled runner very often had the audacity to peg half of his claim into somebody else's, when it must have been perfectly obvious to him that his action would be challenged immediately. I was not a little glad that the gentleman in the blue bathing suit, who had tried similar tactics with me, had cleared off to fresh pastures. As a neighbour, he did not appeal to me.

Forty minutes after the flag had been dropped, the police released the traffic, and permitted the cars to move forward. There began, then, the oddest, maddest, and most exciting motor race

I have ever seen. Crazy as the diggings had appeared before, with thousands of men settling over the field like a swarm of locusts, the spectacle was nothing to the scene that now took place when the army of cars came charging wildly across the veld. The number of splendid, smooth-running limousines destroyed on that day I should not care to estimate ; as for the smaller cars, hundreds of them, I am certain, were wrecked almost beyond repair by being brutally driven across that utterly impossible ground, by men grown diamond mad. Hollywood has never staged a motor-race scene that could ever equal this one ; cars came jolting, banging, groaning, creaking, leaping, skidding, swaying, and crashing, first of all in hundreds, and presently in thousands. It was ghastly to see some cars charging headlong to their doom ; but their owners were past caring. Back axles were breaking by the dozen, everybody was shouting and singing, and to work up the excitement to a still higher pitch, an aeroplane flew low over the cars, and one of the airmen leaned out and began cheering and waving them on. Oh, what a sight it was ! Hoxie and I sat and laughed and shouted until we were hoarse. I didn't notice what Mr. Percy was doing until I put my hand in my hip pocket in search of my brandy-flask, and found it gone. Then I realized why that gentleman, who had dined with princes, had got the length of drinking with the proletariat ; and I saw that what with Percy, and Hoxie, and Reitz, and Rathouse, and several diamond claims thrown in, I had my work cut out for me.

Mr. Darcy's car was among the first to arrive, and when it came in sight we set up a lusty cheer.

"Who is the pretty girl?" asked Percy lazily.

"That's Darcy's daughter," said Hoxie informatively. "An' this, 'ere, is 'er claim."

"Almost I regret not having shaved this morning," said Percy gallantly, as Shirley came up.

"So you pegged it?" she cried, rushing up to me. And then: "Oh dear! Your *eye*!"

I told her that I had had a bit of a scrap.

"An' 'e knocked 'is man out," said Hoxie. "I seen it done."

Mr. Darcy gave me a hearty whack between the shoulder-blades. "Well done! Well done!" he remarked paternally. "But you want a bit of raw steak on that bruise."

"My old mother 'ad a better cure," said Hoxie gravely. And he put his head to the side winningly, and looked at Shirley archly.

"Yes?" she said.

"Why, she'd just kiss the sore spot," said Hoxie calmly.

Shirley laughed. Then I saw the lovely colour flood her cheeks, and creep right down to her throat. She glanced at her father, and said defiantly: "Well, who's afraid?" And next moment she had stooped down and kissed me swiftly on the eyelid. Her face was scarlet, but not less so, I can swear, than mine. I was angry with her for this absurd folly, for I realized, at once, her father's keen displeasure. The lady herself was conscious that she had blundered. She walked away about ten paces, set a bottle of champagne on the earth,

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walked back to us, heeled round, whipped an automatic out of her pocket, levelled it, and shivered the neck of the bottle with one of the neatest shots I have ever seen. That shot was prophetic ; but happily, none of us knew it at the time.

"What ye doin' ?" Hoxie gasped.

She kicked a clod of earth with the toe of her riding-boot, and gave her father an elfin, side-long glance. "Letting my father see that if I can kiss young men I can shoot them, too, if need be," she said naively.

"Sit down, child," said Mr. Darcy. "Tut ! tut ! All things considered, however, I think we shall trek to-morrow."

"Why ?" she demanded angrily.

"I think," said he, "we shall trek to-morrow, my dear."

"After promising ?" she cried. "But I want to see my claim worked ! Oh, Mr. Lewis, is this fair ? We have a Ford van arriving with a big tent, and full camping outfit. And I wanted to see the circus !"

"We shall go to the circus, but to-morrow we trek, Shirley," said Mr. Darcy quietly "Sit down."

She obeyed without a word.

CHAPTER XIV

INTERLUDE

THE big event was now over ; each man had pegged his own or his friend's claim, and tents and shacks were now being rushed up by the hundred. By the time darkness had fallen, knots of diggers were gathered here, there, and everywhere, round their primus stoves or buckets of glowing coal. The South African is never happier than when out of doors, squatting round a camp fire. It is then that one hears the pet snake story, or the pet lion story ; it is then that the patriarch of the party recounts his favourite Boer War reminiscence ; and it is then that the politician works himself into a fever over the flag question. Reitz and Rathouse had joined our little band towards five o'clock, and Mr. Darcy had stood us all a memorable dinner at the Johannesburg Café. Afterwards, I think we might all have been content to sit round the huge bucket of red coal that Mr. Darcy's natives had placed outside his tent ; but Shirley was restless. Shirley kept patrolling outside the circle, walking on her "wild lone," like Kipling's cat ; and as she walked her father would turn his eyes to right and left, to see that he never lost sight of her. He, poor fellow, was suffering from an appalling cold, and was sneezing violently. It had certainly become very

chilly, but the season was autumn, and we were steadily advancing towards winter. I do not think, to be perfectly honest, that I was looking forward to sleeping night after night on the diggings, and it seemed to me that Mr. Darcy was already finding camp life a little strenuous. He had given us all our orders. Rathouse and I were to work Shirley's claim, and du Toit was to superintend the washes ; that is to say, du Toit was to be present every Friday. Reitz and Hoxie had pegged and were working claims on their own, but after six days had elapsed (the time fixed by the Government) Mr. Darcy thought it probable that he might peg some more claims, in which case he would be able to employ Reitz and Hoxie, and give them a little financial help. They agreed to this proposition. I could not see where du Toit stood in the business, unless as private detective ; but a great deal that was obscure to me was yet to be made plain. I scented adventure in the air ; and later, I got it. When Shirley fired that little silver-plated automatic of hers over her claim, I might have taken that shot as a sign and a warning.

"What with the roaring of the lions and your sneezes, Daddy, there's quite a considerable amount of noise here," said Shirley. And she strode about, hands in her breeches pockets, her head cocked like a bird's.

"I suppose the lions are thrilling you," said her father. "Dear, dear, am I not a most unfortunate man, possessing a daughter who gets so very easily excited ! Life is such a smooth affair for some parents." And he sneezed.

"Which is very rough on you, I admit," Shirley said over her shoulder. "The roars *are* thrilling me, Daddy! I feel rather like an early Christian, awaiting my turn in the arena."

"Perhaps you do! But I do not feel like Nero!" he told her. "I am not sending you into the arena; not to-night, at any rate."

"But I *want* to go!" she said coaxingly.

Mr. Darcy blew his nose. "Perhaps Mr. du Toit and Mr. Lewis will escort you to the circus and back," he said amiably. "But like Mr. Pepys, I think I'll to bed."

She turned, gave her shoulders a shrug, glanced at me, and then looked up at the stars.

"Well?" she said slowly.

"Miss Darcy, I shall be delighted," du Toit suavely assured her. "That riding-suit becomes you. Let me play Orlando to your Rosalind."

I murmured something appropriate, and got to my feet.

"Don't be late, and do take care of her," Mr. Darcy admonished us.

I was on the point of saying: "This young woman will be able to look after herself, sir," but checked myself in time. I had spoken very little to Shirley since the unfortunate incident that preceded lunch. It was my earnest intention that Mr. Darcy should see that he need not hurry his daughter from Grasfontein on my account. But Shirley, I felt, resented my sudden frigid politeness, for she appeared to bristle like a hedgehog when in my presence.

"That's a very funny-looking thing you've got

round your neck, Mr. Lewis," she remarked, as we set off.

I was wearing my navy greatcoat, and a much-washed woollen muffler.

"The colours ran a little," I said coldly. "They are my University colours. I also ran, you know."

"Ah! From the University?" asked du Toit, chuckling.

"Precisely," said I.

Du Toit was wearing a grey raincoat; he looked exactly like an elephant, and thrust his way clumsily through the crowd, Shirley beside him, with less grace than a bear. Near the circus, there was a large gathering of people, and the din was deafening. A man was shouting: "Seats to all parts six bob, standing seats four bob," and men and women were pushing and jostling everywhere.

"What's a standing seat?" sniggered du Toit.

"Not much of a standing joke," Shirley remarked frozenly. "I'm being rather crushed here."

"Ah, it won't matter whether we get in or not," said du Toit fatuously. "There's so much to see out here. Have you noticed the women?"

"There are quite a number," she admitted.

"They'll make more down here than many a digger," he said in my ear, and at this I lifted my right foot and brought it down forcibly on his left one.

"Lewis," said he, "that was my foot!"

"I know," I said under my breath. "But it was meant for your mouth, of course."

He smiled slowly, a lazy, amused, whimsical smile. Then, with a lunge of his great body, he

reached the pay-box. I was just watching him count his change when Shirley marched forward in the line of struggling, motley humanity that was surging into the circus tent, and I darted after her.

"Miss Darcy," I called, "don't rush off! We must wait on Mr. du Toit."

For answer, she suddenly ducked, and attempted to sprint. But I was after her, and caught her by the wrist.

"Now, what are you trying to do?" I blazed out. We were standing in an enormous tent that reeked of sawdust and sweat, and people were pressing in on us on every hand. "Sit down," someone was shouting.

"I'm running away," she said, and ducked again. The movement was so swift that I lost my grip, and the next thing I realized was that I was chasing her round the back of the seats, which were filling rapidly. I can remember seeing some coloured streamers and lights dangling from overhead, but my recollection of the inside of that tent is hazy and vague. I was trying my best to follow a thick fawn jacket, and a pair of riding-breeches, and had eyes for nothing else. Shirley ran right along the back seats or forms, and then stooped. I came up in time to see the heel of one of her riding boots disappear under the canvas, and I was down on my knees, and on my stomach, wriggling after her with all the speed I could muster.

When I had gained the other side, and had got to my feet again, a voice said gently, in the darkness: "Are you there? Coo-ee! Are you there?"

"Is that you, Miss Darcy?" I asked.

"I'm here." She presented herself boldly.

I caught hold of her—firmly, this time. "What do you mean by running away?" I asked her angrily.

"I wasn't running away from you, Mr. Lewis," she said plausibly.

I reminded her that she had owed to the offence five minutes ago.

"I was running away from Mr. du Toit," she said calmly.

I caught my breath. "But why?" I asked her.

"Because I do not like him!" said this astonishing young lady.

I snorted. "One doesn't run away from people simply because one doesn't like them," I said, with some attempt at sternness.

"You didn't like your University, and you ran away from it."

I said I thought that that was a different matter

"It isn't," she argued.

"At any rate," said I, "you see where folly can lead a man. Instead of living sanely under my father's roof, here you see me destitute on a diamond field, with the worst rabble in Christendom."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Lewis!" she cried.

I told her, impatiently, not to be foolish.

"But I *am* foolish!" she owned wheedlingly.

"Very," I said heatedly. "And now, you will please come back with me to Mr. du Toit! At once!"

"No!" she said, with determination. "I wanted to go for a walk round the diggings. Why aren't you nice to me?"

"I am trying to be."

"Are you afraid of my father?" she demanded.

"No," I said angrily, "but I am a good deal afraid of *you*."

At that, she gave a little laugh, and lunged into the darkness; but I went after her, and caught her arm.

"Leave me alone," she commanded.

"Shirley, you are very silly," I told her.

"Who gave you permission to call me Shirley?" she asked pertly.

"You did."

"When?"

"Many times," I said gently "And permission for much more besides."

"You are a very strange man," she said wistfully. I tightened my grip on her arm.

"Am I?"

"Yes," said she, not without temper. "Other young men I have known would have—well—might have——" She hesitated.

"Well?" I said encouragingly.

"They might have kissed me, but they wouldn't have been rude to me."

I asked her which she considered the bigger insult of the two. "Because," I reminded her, "I do not respect all the young women I kiss."

"Don't you?" she asked. "But then," she added coyly, "I don't think you kiss young women."

"Humph," said I, and took a packet of cigarettes from my pocket. As I struck a match to light the cigarette she had accepted, the glow from it illumined her face. She glanced up, and then lowered her

lashes. The match went out. "Black eyes," I whispered in the dark.

"What colour are *your* eyes?" she asked unsteadily.

I struck another match. "Look at them, and tell me," I commanded.

She gave me a swift, shy glance, and then looked away.

"You haven't told me what colour they are, yet," I reminded her, and struck another match.

"Look at them again."

"I won't," she said, and crimsoned.

"Why won't you? The one is blue; the other is at present black and blue. What is unusual about that?" I demanded gently.

"It's the way you look at me," she said breathlessly.

I lit my cigarette. "Aha! Now we know!" I said triumphantly.

"What do we know?" she asked sulkily.

"You think I haven't kissed many young women. . . . That doesn't interest me. But I know something that is more important. I know for a fact, now, that you haven't kissed many men."

"How do you know?"

"By the way you look at me. Or rather, by the way you *won't* look at me."

She was silent.

"Yes?" I said encouragingly.

"I'm not answering your last remark," she said coldly.

"If you had ever been kissed by anyone who

really cared for you, you wouldn't be wandering round the diggings with me," I told her. "Isn't that so?"

"Young men may have cared for me, but I may not have cared for them," she said tartly.

"They haven't cared sufficiently. When one comes along who does, you'll know all about it."

"What shall I know?"

"That kisses without love are as flat as eggs without bacon."

She laughed. "You *are* a strange young man," she exclaimed again. "And you don't respect the women you kiss?"

"Not as a rule."

"Do you respect me?"

"I'm trying to."

She laughed again. "I think we should change the subject," she remarked. "Shall we go for a walk?"

I proffered my arm. "Your father is going to hear a pretty story from Mr. du Toit," I warned her.

"My father knows that I dislike Mr. du Toit. I don't know why. But I do."

"The blame of this escapade will not devolve upon *you*," I reminded her.

"Oh, so *that's* it?"

"No, that is not it!" I said heatedly. "But no father likes to see his daughter pitching herself at a man's head; least of all a penniless man's head."

"Pitching!" she echoed faintly. She paused for a moment, and then turned swiftly, and began to run; but as I threw my cigarette away, and came

up behind her, a drunken digger with a party of others reeled against her in the darkness, and I saw her fall. I pushed and flung the men aside and dragged her to her feet, and she stood whimpering, her hands scratched and skinned, and a bump rising on her forehead.

It was then that I spoke to her forcibly, for I was angry. "You have no business to be here," I said sternly. "It is sheer, crass stupidity and nonsense, and I, for one, am thankful that you are being taken home to-morrow." Then I put my hand on her shoulder, and we began walking back towards Mr. Darcy's tent. She never uttered a sound for about ten minutes, and then I noticed that she was crying.

"Are you hurt?" I asked gruffly. I was sorry my voice sounded so harsh, but I was nervous.

She continued to sob quietly.

"Are you hurt? Hm!" I put my arm about her.

"No. . . . I am not hurt. . . . Not my—not my hands or my face, anyway."

"I am sorry if I have been rude. I apologize."

"You are the rudest man I have ever met."

"Good!" said I, brutally. "Now we shall really attend to the business of diamond digging without further distraction."

I saw her put her handkerchief up to the bruise on her forehead. "I know a good cure for that," I said boldly. And then, in her ear: "Perhaps you are wishing I didn't respect you quite so much?"

She was silent.

"Eh?" said I, and drew her closer.

"Well, perhaps," she said, in a throaty, husky little voice, and hid her face on my breast.

"Where is that bruise, now?" I demanded authoritatively, and put my hand on her head.

She raised her face.

"I think you have hurt your mouth, too," I whispered.

CHAPTER XV

TEN LITTLE NIGGER BOYS

THE following morning the diggings became a hive of industry. All night long people had shouted and sung, babies had cried, and lions had roared, but with the dawn a degree of sanity seemed to return to the community. When I left the shelter of our tent it was to find Rathouse haranguing ten natives in a tongue that was incomprehensible to me. I had understood, from Mr. Darcy, that I was to act in partnership with Rathouse, but this first move of his, in engaging the natives without consulting me, was a fair indication of what I might expect. Rathouse, according to my observations, had never been too enthusiastic about early rising; I did not care for this sudden activity on his part. But I was determined not to yield a single point to him without argument, and when he introduced his ten blackamoors to me with a lordly wave of the hand, I at once challenged his authority for thus acting without my consent.

"Can these natives speak English?" I inquired.

"Why?" he demanded shortly.

I remarked that, if they couldn't, it was obvious that I would be unable to give them orders.

"And who's asking you to give orders?" he rapped out. "*I* can give the boys their orders."

I told him that I had little doubt of that. "But," I added, "you must understand that such an arrangement will hardly satisfy *me*!"

"The deuce it won't!" he said, and gave me a scathing glance. "Look here, Lewis," he counselled, "keep your mouth shut on these diggings, will you? If you don't, you're going to say some things that will sound damn funny to any man who knows anything about diamonds. I've been digging for diamonds these twenty years back, and to listen to a whelp like you, who doesn't know a pick from a shovel, or a dummy from a washing-bucket—well, damn me if it isn't too bloody funny."

"All very logical, Rathouse," I said amiably, "but we'll have at least five natives out of the ten who can speak English."

He sniggered sourly. "They never speak English," he said heatedly. "Not unless they're trained kitchen boys. D'you think I'm going to have you dictate my business to me?"

I told him that if he didn't care to listen to me, Mr. Darcy might.

He lit his pipe, and puffed silently for a while. Then: "Is Darcy working this claim?" he inquired politely.

"No, but he owns it."

"*She* owns it," he said quietly. "And that reminds me, Lewis, don't go hanging round *that* quarter for your fun, or you'll find yourself on the veld without a ticky in your pocket."

I smiled villainously, and said: "Humph."

"Glad you take the situation so humorously," he said resignedly.

"The trouble for you, Rathouse," I warned him, "is that I do not take the situation humorously. Five of these boys must be able to talk a little English, or I won't go on."

He expectorated viciously. "Then you'd better not go on," he advised. "I'm not going to be bullied by a youngster who doesn't know what he's talking about."

"That's for Mr. Darcy to decide," I said sharply.

"Ask him, then," he snorted. "Or, better still, I'll ask him myself."

I said that in that event I would accompany him, and together we strolled over to Mr. Darcy's tent, Rathouse smoking savagely, and muttering all kinds of imprecations under his breath. I had never seen him like this before, and his demeanour boded ill for the future.

"Are you up, Mr. Darcy, sir?" he called, when we reached the tent.

"Come in, come in," called Mr. Darcy's bland voice, and we raised the flap of the tent and entered. My courage all but failed me as I walked in, for I openly admit that after my nocturnal ramble with Shirley I was afraid to meet her father's calm, penetrating eyes. But if he knew anything of that mad escapade, he never betrayed his knowledge with so much as a flicker of an eyelid. His glance, when he looked up at me from his camp chair, was clear, and utterly frank; almost fatherly. "Come in," he said heartily. "Sit down, will you? Have you breakfasted?"

Rathouse remarked that Hoxie was looking after the domestic affairs.

"You seem early birds," said Mr. Darcy heartily. "But such a morning! My cold is much better."

"I was about quite early, engaging the boys, sir," said Rathouse affably. "Ten, I managed to get. Zulus, mostly."

"Think they are all right, then?" said Mr. Darcy. He was putting on his tie, and his suit and linen looked as immaculate as ever, as though, indeed, he had slept in a first-class hotel, instead of in a tent on the diggings.

"Capital boys," said Rathouse. "But young Lewis, here, thinks I don't know my business."

"Pardon," said I, "that wasn't the argument at all."

"What was the argument?" asked Mr. Darcy quietly.

"That five of the boys should understand English," I said boldly, "else how am I to give orders?"

"I see," said Mr. Darcy calmly. "I see."

"*He* doesn't see, sir," said Rathouse, feigning amusement. "The old story of the young man from overseas who thinks he understands the native! Bah!"

A voice said from behind a canvas partition: "What do we hear? Is this the quarrel scene from 'Julius Cæsar'? Mr. Rathouse as Cassius. Mr. Lewis as Brutus. Fanfare of trumpets from without, and enter the heroine." The canvas curtain was raised, and Shirley walked into our midst, surveyed us coldly, and went up to the little shaving mirror that was pinned upon the canvas wall.

"Miss Darcy is a little mixed," I said frozenly,

"for Cleopatra does not appear in 'Julius Cæsar.'"

"What about Shaw's 'Cæsar and Cleopatra'?" Shirley inquired.

All the blood rushed to my ears; I felt them on fire. Shirley's glance was so insolent, and so icy, that it seared me like a lash. She, who had been so yielding, and so warm, now chose to play the haughty lady, and treat me like a lackey. I was white with temper; but pride forced me to keep outwardly calm. I folded my arms, and kept my eyes on the ground, for I could not trust myself to look at her. She had on something white, embroidered with red round sleeves, neck and hem; it was, I think, a sort of kimono, for she wore little flat-heeled bath slippers of scarlet, to match. I saw her glance in the mirror and take out a powder-puff from a bag hanging on her wrist, and then I looked away, and studied the red dust on my hard-worn shoes, a lump in my throat, and anger seething in my heart.

"It seems to me a not unreasonable thing," began Mr. Darcy, lacing his shoes slowly, "that some of the boys *should* be able to speak English; or to understand it. Why not, Rathouse? Would you care to boss a gang of boys who could understand French, and French only?"

"I shouldn't mind, sir, if I'd a French partner to give the orders," Rathouse said surlily.

"The man wouldn't be a partner, at that rate," cut in Shirley quickly. "He'd be your chief, Mr. Rathouse."

"The trouble, of course, is to find boys who can

“speak English,” Rathouse mumbled. He had lost, and evidently did not intend to quibble. “But I could look around,” he added half-heartedly.

“Do,” said Mr. Darcy jovially, “and take Lewis along with you. You can round up some boys and bring them here for inspection.”

I thanked him, still refraining from looking at Shirley, and Rathouse and I withdrew. To my surprise, Rathouse’s mood had completely changed ; but the change appeared to me too swift to be genuine. He went striding about the diggings, talking and laughing with everyone, and introducing me to old acquaintances with a great show of geniality and affability. We breakfasted along with Hoxie and Reitz, and then set out to the native location in search of our boys. I was grateful to Hoxie for accompanying us, for I felt that his presence would check any attempt at double-dealing on Rathouse’s part ; and on this occasion I think that it did.

As I had anticipated, we found, with surprising ease, five boys who understood English. Most of the natives spoke Zulu, Basuto, or Dutch ; but there were hundreds and hundreds of boys seeking work. It was a comparatively simple matter to pick a few boys who had some slight knowledge of my own tongue. That Rathouse had attempted to bluff me on this head, filled me with the most sinister suspicions. As we walked back to Mr. Darcy’s tent, a long line of natives trailing behind us, a strong inclination swept over me to throw up the whole business. Perhaps the sight of ox-wagons and mule carts, and the incessant lash, lash, lashing

of animals, was beginning to get too much for my nerves. Between me and Rathouse a whole epoch of civilization seemed to stretch ; I felt I had been swept back hundreds of years, back to a period of sheer savagery and brute force, where only might was right. Mr. Darcy, it seemed to me, was the only relict of the twentieth century ; when he had gone, I would be alone to battle with all the cruelty, superstition, and vice of the Middle Ages. I was not afraid, God knows, but I did not feel my stomach strong enough for the ordeal. And then, if you remember, I was a knight at loggerheads with his lady. Perhaps, to be frank, that was worrying me most of all.

Mr. Darcy came out of his tent and glanced at our little company of natives, like a general surveying his troops ; then he spoke to some of the boys, and selected a handsome Zulu of the name of Jan Mataludi, to be the boss-boy over the other nine. This native was a powerfully-built man, about six feet four in height, with the features and carriage of a prince. He could talk three languages fluently—Zulu, Basuto and Dutch ; and he understood a little English. When he entered the tent, and stood before Mr. Darcy to receive final orders, I felt that I had gained an ally ; honesty shone from Jan's eye, and sunshine flashed from his smile. He was a superb specimen of his proud race, straight-limbed as a god, and unconscious as an animal. Shirley was sitting on a camp chair, still wearing the white kimono ; but I noticed that Jan was no more than a piece of furniture to her, for she never so much as glanced at him. Watching him standing

there beside her, humble and submissive, made me think of a tamed lion in a cage ; and somehow, it seemed a pity that the lion had been tamed.

"Now," said Mr. Darcy briskly, when Jan had gone, "I think we have settled everything very satisfactorily. You can dig this week and wash on Friday, and probably Mr. du Toit will run down for me, if I can't manage along. In any case, I may want some more claims."

"I shall be almost certain to want them, Daddy," Shirley remarked, and yawned. "*Must* we trek this morning?" she inquired.

"Yes. About ten o'clock," said her father. "We say our farewells now, my dear. Our men are going off to begin operations." And he shook hands with Rathouse and me. "Good luck," said he, "and good hunting."

"Goodbye, Mr. Rathouse," said Shirley languidly. "Goodbye, Mr. Lewis." She bowed, and went on looking at herself in the mirror she had just snatched off the wall, patting the waves in her hair with neat, slim-fingered brown hands. "Did I kiss you this morning?" she asked her father. "I don't think I did." She advanced to where Mr. Darcy sat, and swiftly brushed the top of his head with her lips. Then suddenly she seized my arm, dragged me behind the canvas partition, and saluted me ardently. "*Et tu, Brute*," she whispered.

"Shirley!" called her father.

"Is Mr. Rathouse there, Daddy?"

"Mr. Rathouse has gone." His voice was stern.

"Then why are you shouting? I'm trying to

give Mr. Lewis my automatic without Mr. Rathouse's knowledge, and you go advertising it, Daddy ! ”

“ Oh, is that it ? ”

I reappeared, the automatic in my hand. “ It is very kind of Miss Darcy,” I stammered. “ I daresay I shall feel safer with this.”

“ Goodbye, Mr. Lewis,” said Shirley indifferently.

“ Goodbye,” I said awkwardly, and bowed my departure ; but as I went round the tent outside, a bare, sunburned arm was thrust through an opening in the canvas, and I caught the hand and crushed it. . . . Released, the fingers wagged playfully, and then the arm was withdrawn, slowly and reluctantly. . . .

I walked on, whistling.

CHAPTER XVI

BRASS TACKS

ON my way back to the tent I shared with my three fellow fortune-seekers, I made a detour in order to view the digging operations being carried on at one of the biggest workings in the reserve. My chief idea in seeking solitude, I will honestly own, was to regain my composure ; happy as I felt, I was wise enough to know I looked a fool. But the sight of men, machinery, and mules, helped to restore me to a more normal condition of mind. I stood beside one of the syndicate workings, where three or four claims had been thrown into one, and a small crane was scooping up the diamondiferous gravel from a pit about thirty feet deep. There was an up-to-date washing plant working steadily, and the overseer in charge, a white man whose beard and clothes were caked with red dust, was shouting directions to some natives who were siphoning water from a forty or fifty gallon tank standing on an ox-wagon, to a tank near the washing-machine. This feat was accomplished by means of a long pipe, about two inches in width, and bent at one end. The bend end was dropped into the tank on the wagon, and the pipe was led into the other tank. A native then stooped down and

sucked the end of the pipe, and presently skill and patience were rewarded by a sudden gush of water, which continued until the wagon tank was empty. All this I found interesting. I was standing watching the proceedings when a man, who had been loitering in my vicinity, and whom I had not particularly noticed hitherto, remarked impressively: "Beautiful gravel!" and sighed deeply.

"Beautiful," I agreed. For it was. Some of the stones seemed to shine all colours of the rainbow.

"They've made a reg'lar de Beer mine out of this," said the man instructively. "A miniature Kimberley. But it's a wonderful country for diamonds. A wonderful country." And he sighed heavily for the second time.

"Yes?" said I, and looked at him. He was an old campaigner, with knotted hands, and a face like leather.

"I been a digger for thirty years," said he, "and here I am, still waiting for my glassy. Think of them days," he went on, "when a man could buy shares in Tom Cullinan's mine at half-a-crown apiece! Tom Cullinan—him that got the Cullinan diamond, you know. Premier Mines, Pretoria way."

"Yes?" I said encouragingly.

"Digging's the life," he said philosophically. "But I reckon my luck's about due. I got a claim up your way. Near Hoxie's."

I asked him if he knew my companions, and he nodded, and filled a clay pipe. "Every digger knows me," said he. "De Villiers is my name. Fifty-five years, I am, and buried two wives; one

at Kimberley, one at Elandsputte. I got my little girl here. Twelve, she is. Born on the diggings. Making a splash for her, when my glassy turns up."

I told him I wished him the best of luck, and was on the point of turning to walk away, when a hand was placed on my arm, and looking round I found myself gazing into the face of Simcox, my acquaintance of the train. The vicissitudes through which I had recently passed had caused me to forget the Cape Town clerk completely; this second meeting with him had the quality of a nightmare. I suddenly remembered and realized that I had defrauded this man of five pounds; and here he had me by the arm. Cold perspiration beaded my brow. I glanced at him furtively, like a schoolboy who has been caught in the act of robbing an orchard, and wonders, vaguely, if the master of the house will grant him clemency. "Oh, it's—it's you," I said weakly, and forced a feeble smile.

"Yes, it's me," he said ungrammatically, his face very red. "Yes, it's me. I never forget anything, see? I never forget anything." Plainly he had felt the loss of that five pounds keenly; anger was making him almost incoherent. I saw at once that unless I resorted to bluff and insolence, and took a very high hand with him, things might not go too pleasantly with me. I looked him up and down with a calm, deliberate stare, and then firmly removed his detaining hand.

"Pardon me," I said coldly. I put my hand in my breast pocket, took out my pocket-book, and produced some notes. "Even the best people lose the addresses of their friends, occasionally," I said

quietly. "But that, of course, is no reason why they should lose their tempers, too." And I counted out six pounds in notes, and handed them to him.

"Thank you," he said curtly, pushing the notes away. "I don't want my money back."

"Don't you?" I asked, feigning surprise. "I am offering you a pound interest. Surely that is good enough?"

"You took that five pounds off me on condition you pegged a claim for me. I happen to want that claim."

"Lots of people want things they can't have," I said amiably. "For instance, at the present moment I want you to see reason, but I doubt if I can get you to do it. When I took your money I did not realize, at the time, that I could not peg for you unless you had a licence."

"But your friend knew!" he burst out. "And you'll have pegged a claim for yourself?"

I was silent.

"Have you?" he demanded.

I admitted, reluctantly, that I had.

"Where?"

I told him I did not think that that was any concern of his.

"But it is!" he said angrily. "I'll trouble you to remember that the police camp is over there." He jerked his head threateningly. "You can transfer your claim to me."

"Why should I?" I bluffed. I was aware, however, that argument would lead us nowhere; I knew I had lost my claim, and that the dispute had better be settled as amicably as possible. Before

I returned to the tent, I had arranged the transfer. But parting with that promising little patch of red soil was like parting with my most cherished hopes; I had no heart to peg a claim elsewhere. As I walked over the rust-red earth, I dug my heels angrily into the hard sod, and when I entered the tent I at once knocked the neck off a small beer bottle and stood drinking sullenly, my face heavy as thunder, and my spirits at zero.

"Now, what's the matter with *'im*?" said Hoxie, pointing a playful finger at me. "'Ere we are, arrangin' a meetin', an' 'e barges in like the chairman."

"Who is the chairman of this meeting?" I inquired.

"I am," said du Toit fatuously. "As a matter of fact, on this occasion the chairman is a great deal more important than the meeting."

I threw the beer bottle away, and faced him. "Well, then?" I asked.

"It's like this, you see, Lewis," said Rathouse, in businesslike tones. "Our aim is to form a syndicate. Well, not exactly that. But look at it this way. Apart from being Darcy's hired men, we've got claims of our own, and each man wants to make his pile."

"Ah, don't, I beg, be quite so modest about it," said du Toit, and lit a cigarette.

"I fail to see the humour of the situation, Mr. du Toit," said Rathouse hotly.

Du Toit shrugged. "Naturally," he said quietly. "But I do!"

"Order, now, order," said Reitz, in the voice

that he reserved for his oratorical addresses. "I move that we—that we get down to brass tacks."

"Brass is far enough, I reckon," said Hoxie good-naturedly.

"Splendid!" said du Toit. "Have any of you noticed that Alec Hoxie sometimes says quite a humorous thing? Is it accidental, I wonder? It must be. In this instance, he has really hit the nail on the head."

"The tack," said I. "The brass tack."

Du Toit chuckled. "A Scotsman has seen a joke," he remarked. "Lewis has seen a joke. Almost anything may happen at this meeting now, and I shan't be surprised. Proceed, Rathouse."

"Well, you see, it's like this, Lewis," Rathouse repeated. "We want to share. Here's Hoxie with a good claim on L. Here's yourself with a good claim on L. And here's Reitz and me with good claims on D."

"The L claims are the most promisin', I reckon," Hoxie put in quickly.

"Pish!" said du Toit. "There's no difference between L and D. There never *has* been."

"Meaning?" asked Reitz curiously.

"Meaning L—and damnation," said du Toit, laughing softly. "Remarkable that you fellows should gravitate to L and D portions. I have always been a fatalist."

"Gee," said Hoxie laconically, "I don't know what my beliefs are, but I'd like Jim to speak up and say somethin' worth listenin' to."

"At that rate, you must have apostolic faith," said du Toit sardonically.

"Are we to treat that as humour?" asked Rathouse angrily.

"Certainly not," said du Toit. "As truth, of course. Think of Annie Besant's slogan: 'There is no religion higher than Truth.'"

"I reckon, you know, I don't hold much with religion," said Reitz.

"Not the highest type, perhaps," said du Toit. Rathouse got up. "That's about enough, Mr. du Toit. You've insulted me, and now you're calling Archie Reitz a liar."

"Sit down, Jim," cried little Hoxie. "'E didn't, man. 'E didn't."

"He did," said Rathouse irately. "Du Toit says: 'There's no religion higher than Truth,' and Archie says: 'I reckon I don't hold with religion.' Then du Toit says: 'Not the highest type, perhaps.' That's as good as calling Reitz a liar."

"Sit down, Jim," cried amiable little Hoxie. "If that's callin' a man a liar, damn me if it isn't the most roundabout way I've ever 'eard of. What d'ye say, Lewis?"

I said that I thought it would be advisable for us to get back to the discussion of the claims on L.

"Precisely," said du Toit. "If I remember rightly, we were discussing the letter, and strayed on to the spirit. Proceed, Rathouse."

"It's Lewis who's to speak up," said Reitz, as Rathouse seated himself again. "Jim has put the proposal before us, and we will now hear what Lewis has got to say."

"He's a Scotsman. I'd much rather hear what he's thinking," said du Toit.

"Perhaps Mr. du Toit says a great deal with the object of preventing people from thinking," I said slyly. "Of course, in regard to this scheme about sharing, I am quite willing to share, provided it doesn't matter *where* the various claims are."

"Spoken like a man, that is," said Hoxie.

"Man, it wouldn't matter to *me* where the claims were," said Rathouse.

"No! Not among pals, Lewis," said Reitz sentimentally.

I began to whistle Carmen's maddening, taunting little lilt. "Well, then," I said at length, "as a matter of fact, I haven't *got* that claim of mine."

Rathouse sprang to his feet. "You sold it?"

"No," I said sharply. And then I told them my story. "If there was anything sold, it was myself," I concluded.

"You're right, there," said Hoxie sadly. But the other three men were silent.

"Well?" I inquired presently.

"You don't expect me to form a syndicate *now*, do you?" asked Rathouse.

"Lewis should have spoken up when he came in," said Reitz weakly.

I glanced at du Toit. "And the chairman? What does he say?" I asked.

"The chairman, as I told you, is much more important than the meeting," said du Toit, suavely, "and as the chairman has just decided that if he doesn't make haste he will lose his train for Joh'burg, the meeting is at an end."

"Hear, hear!" said Reitz. He cleared his throat. "But before we go, the meeting closes with a vote of condolence to Lewis, for the loss of his claim. Which I—which I now move," he added pompously.

"Each for himself," said Rathouse.

"Each for himself," I echoed; and at that instant a little black kitten came leaping into the tent, and rubbed herself on my legs. "The luck and the pleasure will be mine," I added.

CHAPTER XVII

I BECOME A KNAVE OF SPADES

I WAS now settling down to life at the diggings, growing accustomed to the glare of red earth and cobalt sky, and to the palpitating silence of the African night, when the very ground suspired mystery, huts became black as jet, and the deep blue of the heavens would be riddled by a thousand stars, Venus a pale, limpid aquamarine, and the moon a sharp, silver crescent, or veiled and golden and glowing, like an amber light shining softly through a great disc of alabaster.

We were a strange community. Three days after the rush, Mrs. Reitz and Mrs. Jeppe had joined us. Rathouse, Hoxie and I shared a bell tent together, and in the next tent to ours lived Reitz and his wife, and that indomitable widow, Mrs. Jeppe, who saw no evil and did none, and splendidly upheld decency by means of a ragged mosquito curtain that hung betwixt the bridal couch and hers. To the left of us, in a dwelling made of sandbags, lived the close companion of princes in company with a woman. I cannot call the lady in question Percy's wife, but, in point of fact, she *was* a wife; that is to say, she was the wife of another man.

So much I learned from Percy when the lady was in her cups. I had called to pay my neighbourly respects to Percy, and had been somewhat startled by the unlooked-for spectacle of what must once have been a good-looking young woman, lying on a pile of sacks, her stockings riddled with holes, her hair matted and dishevelled, and her shoes in tatters. She wore a jumper that may originally have been buff colour, but was now a greasy khaki, and a nondescript skirt grey with dirt. Her arm was flung carelessly out as she lay, and Percy surveyed her dispassionately, inclined his head in her direction, and said quietly: "My wife. At least," he added, "you might as well call her that, although legally she is somebody else's." As I advanced towards the young woman, thinking she might perhaps stir herself in order to greet me, he added casually: "Don't bother to speak to her, Lewis. She's drunk."

Much as Percy's degeneracy and naked poverty revolted me, I confess that there were moments when I was glad of his company; he still had the semblance of a gentleman, and although the soles of his shoes were worn through, his intellect was sound. If I could have helped him in any way, I would willingly have done so, but he was beyond the kind of assistance that I could have offered. At my own expense I had persuaded Mrs. Jeppe to supply Percy and his "wife" (her name, I learned, was Leslie) with food daily, and he was sober for ten days, and promised to work his claim and retrieve his character and his fortunes. But at the end of that period we missed him, and dis-

covered him later on the mud floor of his shack, drunk as a lord, and dead to the world, the lady Leslie by his side in the same state of inebriation and abandon. None knew whence the money had come, but it was afterwards found that, in a fit of weakness, he had sold his promising claim for ten pounds, and, to borrow little Hoxie's expressive phrase, "blued the lot on booze."

I scarcely ever saw Percy's lady. If, at any time, I met her strolling about the diggings, she would give me such a haughty glance and condescending bow that a much less sensitive man than I might have been given cause to feel that he, and not the lady, had been secretly tippling. I respected the lady Leslie for thus carrying off what was surely, for any young woman, an awkward and distressing situation. She might have been Marie Antoinette, suffering, with noble fortitude, the insults of the soldiery in the Conciergerie, so regally did she bear herself in the company of other diggers. Every man respected her, and hard-working little Mrs. Reitz was entirely overshadowed by her importance and mystery. The domesticated, good-natured Clara was always in the background. She had been in the background during her wedding, and was now more so than ever. If spoken to, she invariably giggled, and went off lightheartedly to superintend some dish she was cooking; and she hummed and whistled all the while, after the manner of servant girls.

We were a musical gathering. De Villiers was one of our near neighbours, and afflicted our ears nightly with impromptu serenades, sawed out on

an old violin. Part of his left shoulder having been shot away during the Boer War, he played the fiddle like a 'cello, resting it on his knee, the tail-piece upwards. He had an old hurdy-gurdy harmonium in his tent, chronically asthmatic, and so far out of tune that it was possible for one to play it in a certain key and discover that the written music and the resulting notes produced by the fingers on the keyboard were entirely at variance. But happily for old de Villiers, this did not jar on his music-loving ear; he penalized his little daughter Joanna into sitting for hours at the wheezy harmonium, grinding out accompaniments to his violin solos with her legs working the pedals as though she were on a treadmill. Her aunt, who ruled the de Villiers roost, and was known as Miss Lorenzo, would stand by the side of the harmonium like the Roman soldier, who, though the destruction of Pompeii was taking place, durst not leave his post, and bray at the moon in a melancholy contralto. Miss Lorenzo was one of my staunchest friends; but occasionally I had difficult moments with her, for she was always favouring and embarrassing me with her confidences. "This diggins, Mr. Lewis. . . . You'll notice I 'aven't me teeth in to-day. Yesterday I was down at K portion, seein' me sister—her that's expectin'. She was took sudden, you know. . . . I 'ad me teeth in me 'and at the time, an' I laid 'em down somewheres, not knowin' what I done, an' I ups and runs for the doctor as 'ard as ever I could. An' when 'e come an' it was all over, I looks around for them teeth o' mine, an' Goad! I dunno *where* to find 'em."

"Wait till we start washin'," Hoxie had told her. "Some of us blocks will be turnin' 'em up as diamonds."

What with de Villiers' serenades, the barking of dogs, roaring of lions, and the noise caused by frolicsome diggers, shooting at tin cans, evenings were certainly lively enough. But days were crowded with work. We had not been long in commencing operations. On the morning of Shirley's and Mr. Darcy's departure, our company of blacks began digging. A trench or pit was first of all dug right across the claim, in an endeavour to discover whether the working was going to prove deep or shallow; the business was Greek to me, but Rathouse appeared to know what he was about, and he was of opinion that the working was going to be deep. The trench was dug in a slope, and over a foot of ordinary earth—earth, that is to say, that grass might grow on—was taken out, the soil that, in the vernacular of the diggings, is called "overburden." Below the overburden, we struck what is known as "kaffir corn"—diamondiferous gravel composed of small, reddish stones. We went down through about three feet of this; it was probable that it might yield diamonds, Rathouse informed me, but if so, they would be of poor quality. From the kaffir corn we progressed to yellow shale, mixed with a peculiar-looking white lime formation. Diamonds were sometimes found in yellow shale, Rathouse said, but very rarely. He was looking for a certain pinkish-coloured soil, and presently we struck it, and came upon boulders and rocks. Diamonds (if the

claim was going to yield any) would be found here.

We dug for about a week. It was hard work for the natives, and Rathouse was a merciless master. During the daytime, from noon until three o'clock, the heat was very great, and perspiration poured off the faces of the boys like rain. I took my turn at the heavy work, but this action was strongly condemned by my companions; a white man, it appeared, did not lose caste if he played cards all day in a gaming hell, but if he shouldered a pick and worked beside a native, he was looking for trouble. The natives worked steadily from sunrise until sunset, with half an hour for breakfast, and one hour for lunch. It was back-breaking work, and after a few hours of it my hands were blistered, and my shoulders ached, for the rocky soil was hard as iron. It was slavery; paid slavery, perhaps, but slavery for all that. There were white men on the diggings who were good to their boys; but Rathouse was not one of them.

On Thursday night du Toit reappeared, and honoured us with his presence. To my surprise, he spent the evening with Anita, dining with her at the Dutch Café. We saw nothing more of him until the following morning, when he strolled up to our claim in order to superintend washing operations, suave and gracious as ever. Like Shirley, I disliked du Toit; but whether he was knave or fool I could not yet determine.

"I have a little crystal bottle for Miss Darcy's diamonds," I said banteringly to him, as he stood

by the washing machine, smiling, smiling . . .

"I hope we fill it."

"Ah, *I* have instructions to carry Miss Darcy's diamonds," he said with soft emphasis. "Remember, Lewis, that all diamonds must be handed over and registered by *me*."

CHAPTER XVIII

WE BEGIN TO WASH

ON this, the occasion of my first experience of "washing," I was all agog with curiosity and excitement; but "wash" day, for the digger, is always one in which he hovers betwixt wild joy and blank despair. There may be no diamonds, there may be a few diamonds, and there may be—who knows?—the long-dreamed-of "glassy," that is going to fetch thousands. On Fridays the diamond-buyers arrive from Johannesburg, and take up their stands in little wood and iron shacks, each shack flying its flag. There is a little opening like that in a railway booking-office in front of each hut, and behind this opening sits the buyer, waiting for the diggers, who come up, one by one, to offer their "finds."

"Washing" is an expensive process, a tank of water costing about twenty-five shillings. We had a large pyramid of diamondiferous gravel ready to wash, and operations were commenced by two natives, who each held an end of what is called the "baby" or "rocker"—a long, trough-like sieve. The sieve was filled with gravel, and then swung slowly from side to side in a rocking movement, that sent the large stones and boulders flying out-

ward on to a heap. After the soil had been subjected to this crude process of sifting, the gravel was ready for the washing-machine. I can best describe the simple machine we used by saying that it resembled a large preserving pan, standing on four legs. Gravel was passed along a chute into the pan, a native standing with a bucket and pouring water upon the soil, as it travelled downward. Within the machine were four bars, which were kept in revolution by means of a handle, turned by natives ; and wearying work it was. The mixture within the pan resembled particularly rich-looking, slimy mud, and as the bars revolved this mud churned like porridge. All the heavy stuff passed, by slow degrees, out of a chute, and the thick mud was dumped upon a gravitating sieve. A native now stood over a large bucket, half-filled with water, and plunged the sieve gently out and in, until the gravel was cleansed of the mud. This is the breathless stage at which diamonds are likely to show up, for the heavy stones and diamonds invariably fall to the bottom of the sieve, and when its contents are overturned on top of the sorting table, the diamonds (if there are any) are usually glittering in the centre.

As Rathouse took the first sieve from Jan Matauludi, I and du Toit and Hoxie were standing around in a state of eager anticipation ; I can, at any rate, vouch for my own enthusiasm. Our sorting table was placed in a little shed, hastily erected, to shut out the strong, almost blinding rays of the sun, and a wet sack was spread on a wooden bench. Upon this sack the sieve was overturned. We stood,

our heads in the darkness, peering anxiously at the sodden gravel, and then suddenly we all gave a cry. Right in the centre of the table, peeping out from among the other stones, glittered a pale, amber-coloured diamond.

"Ha!" said du Toit. "Number one." And he picked the stone up, and laid it in the centre of his large, white hand.

"Beauty," said Rathouse enviously.

"Ah, but that chap won't fetch much, 'e won't," said Hoxie. "'E's second water, that's what 'e is. About three carat, I reckon, but you won't get much for 'im."

"He's a fine colour," said du Toit. "I'll wager that that diamond will fetch a good price."

"With that flawr in 'im?" cried Hoxie.

"Where's the flaw?" I asked curiously. I was experiencing the most peculiar sensation, standing looking down at that beautiful amber gem in du Toit's hand. All this sordidity, this mud, this filth—and now, this! "Let me hold it," I said childishly, and took the diamond up carefully in my fingers.

"Hoxie's right. *There's* the flaw," said Rathouse, pointing.

"Where?" I asked again.

"That little black speck in 'im," Hoxie explained. "See 'im, du Toit?"

Du Toit said disappointedly: "Um. He won't fetch so much, after all. But give me the scraper." And he took a triangular-shaped piece of zinc, and beginning at the centre of the gravel, commenced overturning and spreading it, working outward in

slow circles. When he had got about half-way, Hoxie cried: "There's another!"

"And another," I gasped excitedly.

"Ah, but they're small, small," said du Toit leisurely and calmly. And they were. We made no other finds that day, despite hard washing, save a dozen sand diamonds, practically worthless.

But something of the fever of diamond digging had come upon me, and more than six days having elapsed, I decided to peg a claim for myself and say nothing about it to anyone. Next day, during the lunch hour, I strolled over to section A—a spot I fancied for the excellent reason that it was a good distance from my companions. Most runners who had taken part in the rush had pegged on L, H, and D, which were presumed to be the richest portions; but the finds of the previous day's washes, on all claims, had been poor, and a rumour was afoot that Grasfontein was going to prove a pot hole diggings. It seemed to me, therefore, that it did not matter where I pegged; one place was as good as another. I decided to walk over A portion, and chance my luck by dumping down my pegs at the most unpromising spot I could find. Which I did. I walked to a low-lying piece of ground, and measured off three claims; for there was nothing like being thorough about the matter, I thought amusedly. I would now have three claims, since the law permitted it, and perhaps the Devil himself would help me work them.

"Hi," an old man called out excitedly, "ye're never peggin' in sich a like place, young man?"

At the sound of that beloved, barbaric-sounding Doric, I drove in my pegs with fresh zest.

"Aye, I'm peggin'," I called back broadly.

"Ye gomeral, look at the soil!" he said concernedly. "They pit a test hole doon there, when the place was a' prospectit. Ye're daft tae peg in sich a spot! I wadna pay the sewage fee on a bit ground like that."

I remarked, then, that if I worked these claims I would employ him as overseer; and I asked him his name. He told me, MacLachlan. He was a hard-bitten, tough old Scot, painfully candid, and brutally honest. We started talking, and when he learned the name of my home town, went nigh to embracing me with as much fervour as a Frenchman.

"Ye'll know Swanston?" he cried enthusiastically.

"None better," I told him.

The suspicion of a tear dimmed his eye. "I've been in this country for five and thirty year," he said, a far-away, lost note in his voice. Then he launched forth into a sea of anecdote. Did I know?—and could I remember? He would speak of familiar places he had known and loved in the Old Country, conjuring the names up from the past and mentioning each carefully in turn, as though the sound of them all was sweetest music. When I parted from him, we were firm friends; I was glad of this, for I stood in need of a comrade. I knew by intuition or instinct—call it what you please—that du Toit, Reitz, Rathouse, and even little Hoxie, were a brotherhood, and that I was utterly outside.

Du Toit was always polite to me, but his politeness was overdone ; it amounted to mockery. There was no give and take about that amiable gentleman, and I distrusted his voice ; it was silkier and softer than I could have wished.

When du Toit conversed with Reitz in Dutch, I always felt how much I was in the party, and yet not of it. It was not, however, a case of Dutch versus English. Rathouse and Hoxie called themselves English colonials ; if race prejudice was creeping in and poisoning our relationship with one another, as sons of English settlers Rathouse and Hoxie ought to have sided with me. But du Toit never openly offended or attacked, and therefore Rathouse never defended. What puzzled me mightily was, *would* he defend ? I liked Hoxie, but it seemed to me that, if any dispute arose, he would good-naturedly sit on the fence, and go out of his way to offend nobody. Sometimes, when an action of Rathouse's angered me, I was strongly tempted to complain to du Toit. But some instinct held me back. There were occasions when I felt that a rupture between myself and Rathouse was part of du Toit's game. For he undoubtedly had a game in view. He was working for somebody, and I had an ugly suspicion that that somebody was not Miss Shirley Darcy, but himself.

Du Toit favoured us with his company that week-end, departing on Monday ; and we did not see him again until the following Friday, when he returned for our second wash. His appearance in our midst was always a signal for the womenfolk of the camp to put on all their finery, and make magnificent

efforts with the cooking. Strongly to my dislike, Billie and the blonde Anita were now constantly with us ; the former had at first honoured and tormented me with her attentions to the exclusion of the other men, but having wisely arrived at the conclusion that I was tame game, was now openly transferring her affection to Rathouse. Rathouse was extremely popular with the ladies ; Hoxie never had a chance beside that polished gallant. He had Billie and the swarthy Miss Lorenzo on a string, and with Miss Lorenzo the matter was becoming serious—on the lady's side, that is to say. Miss Lorenzo was, I think, honest, but she was plain, and being of Italian extraction, and very dark, Rathouse, like many other colonials, considered her half "coloured," and fit only for insult and abuse. He treated her like a native, and spoke to her like a dog, while she, poor woman, sobbed her heart out in secret. Rathouse's leisure hours were spent in playing with Billie, and torturing Miss Lorenzo ; but Anita, the full-bosomed blonde, was the lady upon whom his eye was fastened. So much I deduced from careful observation. Du Toit philandered with Anita, and Anita was therefore Queen of the harem ; the fact that du Toit noticed her at all increased her value tremendously in Rathouse's eyes. As for Hoxie, he was genuinely in love with Billie, after his fashion, but that beautiful and abandoned minx would have none of him. Our camp was a hot-bed of intrigue, and I dreaded the women's share in it. In a measure, I felt equal to holding my own with the men ; but the task of dealing with the women was beyond me.

Our second wash, happily enough, proved extremely lucrative. Du Toit pronounced himself so well satisfied with the finds that, acting on Mr. Darcy's instructions, he purchased, for the sum of six hundred pounds, three neighbouring claims pegged by diggers on the day of the rush, and hired a crane, and some up-to-date washing plant. Digging was now going to be done in real earnest, and Reitz and Hoxie were hired to superintend the washes. Washing could now be done all day and every day ; and it was therefore agreed that Reitz and Hoxie, and Rathouse and I would work in shifts.

I was impatient to begin my own digging operations, having dreams of returning to England a gentleman of means, but before I could commence work I required a little capital. That week, unfortunately, was a wasted one ; the weather broke down, and it rained continuously for about seven days, reducing us to a state of cold, irritability, and misery that can better be imagined than described. The claims were flooded with water, and we huddled, shivering dejected groups of humanity, under the sodden canvas of our tents, with nothing to alleviate our utter boredom save the crying of unhappy, abused little children, the howls of caged beasts, and the shouts and hilarious laughter of semi-intoxicated men and women. Hoxie, Reitz, and Rathouse, cleared off to gaming saloons, and left me to the joys of old newspapers, and to the yarns of Percy and de Villiers. But after the lapse of a few days, Percy deserted me for a fresh carouse, and I was left to read "Ivanhoe" for the

seventh time. Grateful as I was to Sir Walter, my time would have been better employed had I shadowed my companions, for the rain gave them too much opportunity for talk, and talk, with Rathouse, invariably led to the making of plans—plans which, of course, terminated in some unpleasant action. On this occasion, however, action was delayed until the following week. And it was then that something unusual happened to me.

CHAPTER XIX

WHO WAS THE KNAVE OF CLUBS ?

WHEN the rain had ceased, and we started digging on Mr. Darcy's three new claims, throwing all four into one, washing operations were suspended until du Toit returned to us again on the following Friday, when it was hoped that, the crane having got well ahead with its job, we should be able to begin a continuous wash, working in shifts. A great deal had been happening at the beginning of that week, which finally led to my hiring a tent for myself. It had begun to be very plain to everyone who had eyes to see, that Rathouse had apparently abandoned his covert pursuit of Anita—whether out of diplomacy, because he was anxious to stand well with du Toit, or whether out of sheer ennui, I was unable to decide. Rathouse, at any rate, was not the kind of man to waste much time in preliminaries. The unpleasant fact was soon forced upon me that he and Billie had definitely paired off for what Reitz was afterwards pleased to call "the duration," but I was spared the necessity of asking the moral delinquents to strike camp by Rathouse's clever anticipation of this move. On Wednesday morning he announced that he was

going to pitch a tent over beside his own claim on D portion. Ordinarily, one of us would have exclaimed: "Why?" But the news was met with a stony silence; everyone knew why. Rathouse forsook our circle that night, and we saw little more of Billie. But nobody openly commented on the business. If our morals had been anything like our manners, we should have been a model community.

I had expected, and even hoped, that Hoxie and I would now share a tent. But Hoxie, perhaps out of pique over the loss of his lady, cleared out to a gaming saloon, and thereafter always slept overnight on the premises. I should have liked him better had he cursed Rathouse roundly; indeed, out of sympathy, and an endeavour to force a confidence (for I was curious to know how the land lay between those two) I put my hand on his arm when he came into my tent, and said: "Hard luck, old man." I had made a mistake, however; the look he threw me was withering.

"Lewis," said he, "what the 'ell are ye drivin' at, anyway?"

"Sorry," said I, shortly.

"No offence," he said, his old geniality returning instantly. "But ye oughter be at 'ome, an' goin' to the Sunday School, reg'lar, where they learn you to touch the fallen with a Christian 'and, an' bring 'em to the Lord. This 'ere diggins is no place for ye."

The exodus of Rathouse to D portion had literally wrung the withers of Miss Lorenzo, but she uttered no sound—no sound concerning her lost love, that

is to say. On every other matter, however, she made a most unconscionable amount of noise, venting her wrath on the rather imbecile, but nevertheless innocent, de Villiers. I would waken at night to hear her shouting from a neighbouring tent: "Goad! Am I never to get a wink of sleep for that snoring?" All day she scolded and lectured and stormed, thrashing unreservedly every child who came within reach. Unfortunately for both the diggers and the children themselves, we had far, far too many youngsters in our midst. Miss Lorenzo took it upon herself to act the old woman who lived in the shoe to the extent of meting out the corporal punishment in which that worthy dame of nursery fame believed, and it soon became dangerous for any child in our area to stray near her tent. "Cold, are ye?" I would hear her shout. "I'll hot ye up, quick enough." As Reitz remarked, the miserable children in our district were only warm when beaten.

By Friday of that week, we had made a considerable hole in the new claims. Early in the morning I was standing in the deepest part of the hollow (we were making some experimental tests with the crane) when I suddenly felt a crushing weight on my head, heard a splitting noise as though something had exploded in my brain, and saw the earth reel. I must have fallen, but cannot recollect doing so; but I do remember that it seemed to me that my legs had dropped away, and I was buzzing round somewhere on a black and red wheel. Zoo-zoo-zoo went the wheel; and then everything became a blank. When I opened my eyes it was to

find myself staring at a canvas roof ; and next instant I saw the face of a strange man.

" Better ? " said the man.

I stared at him. Then the terrifying realization came to me that there had been some accident. Perhaps I was maimed for life ; perhaps dying. . . . A thousand foolish conjectures crowded into my brain. My head was splitting. I thought the pain of it would cause it to burst. And I was sick, sick, and shivering, too ; shivering with agony and nausea. Tears kept blinding my vision. I seemed to be whimpering and crying like a child.

" Goad, I'd 'ave said 'e was dead, doctor, when they brought 'im in ! 'E was as w'ite as w'ite, an' when I seen that blood at the back of 'is 'ead, I says to myself : ' It's all over.' I thought to myself : ' This 'as 'appened some time ago,' but I seen from the way they carried 'im that 'is body 'adn't agone stiff yet. Though you cawn't tell from that, neither, for there was my mother, an' when she died, doctor, we couldn't get 'er corpse to go stiff nohow."

I heard Miss Lorenzo's voice in a kind of evil dream. Away, away, in some black pit, I saw the corpse of Mrs. Lorenzo, pallid and awful, obstinately refusing to do the respectable thing and go stiff. . . . I sniggered crazily.

" Goad ! 'E laughed, there ! " cried Miss Lorenzo.

" He's coming round," said the strange man indifferently. " Keep him quiet, and he'll be all right."

" I can't think how it happened, doctor." This was Rathouse speaking. " I wasn't there at the

time, but from what I can make out from the boys, the crane swung with its load and biffed him right bang on the back of the head."

"Well, I've put in three stitches," said the other voice. "I'd have said he'd been hit with something sharp."

"Reckon 'e fell on one o' them flinty boulders." This was Hoxie speaking. "But I wasn't there to see."

"Reckon you're talkin' through your 'at! 'E fell on 'is fice. Goad! 'is mouth was full of earth, an' 'is lips was bleedin'!" Miss Lorenzo's voice was vehement.

"I think one of the boys was shovelling gravel, and that in throwing the spade load over his shoulder the spade accidentally struck Lewis," said Rathouse. "But you wouldn't get a kaffir to own up to it."

"That's true enough," the doctor agreed, and added: "It's time I was getting along, now, for what with dysentery cases and accidents, I'm kept pretty busy on these diggings nowadays." He shook my hand. "Hope you'll feel easier, soon," he said professionally.

There was a short silence after the doctor had gone, and then Rathouse came over to me. "Lewis," said he, "your luck hasn't been in to-day. Pretty rotten, eh?"

"Pretty rotten," I murmured feebly.

"I'm real sorry," said Hoxie, wringing my hand; and I honestly believe he was. Both men appeared very sympathetic.

"We'll have to get on with the good work,

now," Rathouse said at length. "See you later, you know. But Miss Hottentot will look after you, meanwhile. Eh, Miss Hottentot?"

"Mr. Rathouse, you'll 'ottentot me once too often," Miss Lorenzo cried threateningly.

Rathouse picked up an old yard broom that was lying at the door of the tent. "Hoxie, I'll thrash that vixen one of these days," he promised.

"Jim, you'll make less noise," hissed Hoxie. "Man, this tent's a cas-u-al-ity station, for the present." The little fellow's voice was earnest.

"A whack with a broom handle is a sight too good for a woman who's had a touch of the tar-brush already," said Rathouse pleasantly. "Eh, Hottentot?" Whereupon poor Miss Lorenzo began to cry.

"'Tears, idle tears,'" quoted a soft voice, and du Toit came into the tent, and sat down on a soap-box. "Well, Lewis," said he, "I hear that you are experiencing the delightful kind of headache that is the common reward of all those who get drunk on port."

I endeavoured to smile.

"Like to go to hospital?" he asked affably. "I have my car here, and could run you up to Joh'burg before nightfall."

I thanked him. "I don't think I'm in as bad a state as all that," I remarked heroically.

"No?" said he.

"No," said I. "But a great deal depends on what I feel like to-morrow."

The wash that day, considering Mr. Darcy's expenses, was extremely poor. In the evening,

du Toit showed me the finds—a four-carat diamond, and six small diamonds.

“Rathouse had a wash at his own claim to-day,” du Toit remarked conversationally, putting the diamond bottle back in his pocket.

“I didn’t know Rathouse was working his own claim,” I said with sudden interest.

“Yes, he’s had four boys digging there for a week,” said du Toit. “And Reitz has been digging, too.”

“Did Reitz wash?” asked the lambent-eyed Miss Lorenzo, who had been sitting drinking in the conversation like a curious child.

“Yes, Reitz washed,” said du Toit. “And did pretty well, too, I believe. So did Rathouse. You’ll have to start digging your own claims, Lewis. Your turn next. Rumour has it that you have been forming a Caledonian Society over on A.” And he smiled.

“Did Hoxie wash?” Miss Lorenzo suddenly inquired.

“Hoxie hasn’t been digging,” said du Toit impatiently. “Miss Lorenzo, I am much obliged to you for looking after Lewis, but I dislike discussing business with women.”

Miss Lorenzo’s eyes flashed dangerously, but she remained silent, and walked out of the tent, her lips pursed. I heard nothing more of the matter until the following morning, when she very kindly brought me a basin of water, and commenced talking volubly.

“Goad, you’re better, Mr. Lewis! I’d ’ave come in to see you in the night for you were groanin’

that bad, but a girl's got to be so careful of 'erself down on the diggins, 'ere. If you'll sponge your fice, I'll 'ave a cup o' tea into you, no time. I could 'ave said plenty, yesterday, but I 'olds my tongue, for I says to myself: 'Goad,' I says, 'if I say anythink now I'll 'ave 'im in a fever,' I says, 'an' then they'll 'ave 'im in the 'ospital, an' safe out of the way for good! That's their gyme,' I says to myself, 'but I'll never say nothink to Mr. Lewis until 'e gets more like 'is old self. Then 'e'll give 'em all 'ell,' I says to myself, 'an' then we'll see who's most like a 'ottentot down these parts." She handed me the soap.

I washed my face with hands that trembled, and asked her what she was talking about.

"Mr. Lewis," said she, "you ain't silly enough to believe that there club on the 'ead was haccidental? 'It's a pretty queer thing,' I says to myself, 'that Mr. Lewis gets knocked on the 'ead on a wash day, with piles an' piles of that rich gravel lyin' waitin' for the machine.'"

I said from between the folds of the towel: "Woman, you're mad! You've got a grudge at Rathouse, and it's destroying your reason." But even as I spoke a hideous suspicion awoke in my mind, and I felt myself break into a perspiration.

"Mad's a 'atter, Mr. Lewis! I don't think! The wash is very poor, of course! All lies, dirty lies! An' Rathouse 'as been workin' 'is claim, an' Reitz 'as been workin' 'is claim. An' *they've* done well. Oh, yes! But whose diamonds 'ave they been turnin' up in their dirty washes? Miss Shirley Darcy's diamonds, an' don't you forget it, neither.

Goad, Mr. Lewis, they split your cokernut for you, to keep you out of the way and quiet like, but I reckon I didn't think the cokernut was so full of milk."

I sat, stunned, like a man carved out of stone. Then I said shakily: "Go over to Mr. Darcy's claims, and look for the boss-boy, Jan Mataludi."

"But it's 'ardly daylight yet!" she protested. "An' the boys ain't started."

"Jan sleeps there; he's on guard," I explained to her. "Get hold of him and bring him here, and try, if possible, not to let anyone see you."

She took the basin of water from me, and went out. Then I lay down again on my camp bed, and tried to collect my scattered wits.

CHAPTER XX

I BECOME A DETECTIVE

It was indeed well for me that Miss Lorenzo had not breathed her suspicions in my ear the preceding day ; a high fever would most certainly have resulted. I should have found myself in the long, cool ward of a hospital, and all my ravings and protests would have been put down to delirium. Even now, I felt myself go hot and cold by turns. I was filled with the most ungovernable fury, firstly with du Toit and his confederates, and secondly with myself and my utter impotence. In sheer, blind rage, I struggled to my knees and then tried to stand, but everything swam before my eyes, and I was forced to lie down again. My head still throbbed cruelly, and the bandage put over the stitches came round my forehead, gripping me like a vice. I was a sight for the gods, or the producer of a Wild West film, with my filthy khaki shirt and trousers, my week-old beard, and my bandage. But there was one consolation ; Miss Lorenzo was not likely to fall in love with me.

I heard the patter, patter of bare feet, and presently the flap of the tent was turned back, and Jan's honest black face appeared, his teeth showing white as peeled radishes.

"*Ja, baas?*" he said eagerly. Jan was always anxious to talk Afrikaans or Zulu. When I switched him on to English, he was invariably disappointed.

"How was this *baas* hit on the head yesterday?" I began, watching him closely.

"*Ek weet niet*," he said quickly, and added hastily, in English: "I doan' know, *baas*. I not know. I am at the shop when the *baas* is hit."

"Which shop? Where were you, Jan?"

"Johannesburg shop."

"Johannesburg Café, I'll bet," put in Miss Lorenzo, who was standing by me, grim as a prison wardress.

"Who sent you to the Johannesburg shop, Jan?" I inquired feverishly.

"*Baas* Rathouse, *baas*. I go there for lemonade for the *baas* Rathouse."

"Got 'im out of the way, like," said Miss Lorenzo.

"And you come back and you see this *baas* has been hit and is sick?" I asked.

"*Ja*. Sick is no good," said Jan sympathetically.

Miss Lorenzo and I then began a long cross-examination of Jan, but he was unable to furnish us with any information as to how the "accident" had occurred. He had been told, he said, that the *baas* Lewis had been hit by a pick.

"It's a pick next, is it?" cried Miss Lorenzo. "It's a crane, an' then it's a spade, an' then it's a pick! Goad, why not a bucket?"

"I was to kick the bucket," I reminded her. Then I turned to Jan. "What kind of wash did you have yesterday?" I asked.

"The wash is good, *baas*," he said promptly.

"One rather large diamond, and about six or eight piccanin diamonds?" I said cautiously.

"*Niet, niet*," he cried vehemently. "No, no! There were *baia* diamonds, *baas*! *Baia*!" And his eyes bulged and blazed.

"What?" I cried sharply, and sat up, for when a native says "*baia*" as Jan said it, he means "many times many." My head was spinning; I heard Jan's wild and earnest "bi-a, bi-a" ringing in my ears. "Who washed with you?" I demanded anxiously.

"The *baas* Rathouse, and the *baas* Reitz."

"And *baas* Hoxie?"

"*Niet, baas*. The *baas* Hoxie is not there."

"But the big *baas* was there? The *baas* du Toit?"

"The big *baas*? The big Dutch *baas*? *Niet*. All day he walk about diggings with other *baas*."

"What *baas*?"

Jan did not know. I questioned him closely for about ten minutes longer, and then rewarded him with what, to him, was a princely sum—ten shillings, begging him to keep his eyes open, and his mouth shut, on my behalf. When he had gone, I then applied myself to the task of wording a telegram to send to Mr. Darcy, and wrote out the following:

"Darcy,
Five Gables,
Monro Drive,
Johannesburg.

SEND WIRE TO DU TOIT REQUESTING HIM
STOP WASHING SUSPECT FOUL PLAY PLEASE
TRUST ME AM WRITING YOU FULLY.

Lewis."

That, I thought, ought to set things humming. I felt Mr. Darcy would realize, instantly, that I was not wiring him on some trifling pretext; the letter would explain that I had just grounds for suspicion. I did not know to what address Mr. Darcy could send a wire, but I was confident that du Toit and he must have established some definite line of communication. Du Toit was bound to go to some port of call for Mr. Darcy's letters. Sooner or later, the telegram would come into his hands.

My next duty was to write my letter. I unstrapped my valise, got hold of writing pad and pencil, and covered seven quarto sheets, omitting no detail I thought of the slightest importance. Miss Lorenzo then went in search of a native for me, and we dispatched him secretly to Lichtenburg Post Office, with letter and telegram, and covering message for the Post Office assistant, together with five shillings, and a request that change was to be given to the messenger. The boy who took the telegram and letter was going into Lichtenburg, he told me, to see his wife, who was in service there. I gave him an extra half-crown, and then lay down and had a long, sound sleep. I had played my counterstroke, and already it seemed that a load had been lifted from my mind.

When I awoke, however, I was not so sanguine. I began to wonder if I had not misjudged du Toit, and lodged a charge against him that would lead me into serious trouble. Of Rathouse's treachery I was convinced. Reitz I knew for a fool, and Hoxie was an unstable character. It was not clear to me

that Hoxie was involved in the intrigue that had ended in a blow on the head for me, but I was certain that Reitz was. As for du Toit, he was either an honest simpleton being duped by a couple of rogues, or as double-dyed a hypocrite as ever breathed. I remembered his advice to me on the night of Reitz's wedding, when we two had sat on the top of the kopje, with the lights of the city glinting out of the blackness like gold beads. He had warned me how I must watch Rathouse; he had questioned me carefully as to Rathouse's movements in Cape Town. Why? He had appeared the soul of honour, a man whose deepest concern was the interests of his friend, Mr. Darcy. But was this not the cleverest bluff? It might not be, of course. . . . I tossed and turned on my little camp bed, and held my aching head. Perhaps Mr. Darcy would tell me, very cuttingly, to mind my own business! My cheeks burned. I wished, now, that I had never sent that wire. I should have spoken to du Toit about Rathouse; du Toit was an innocent and honest man. Du Toit believed that there *had* been an accident. And yet. . . . No, no! I did not trust du Toit. He had taken that accident too calmly; he had been positively casual. There had been no inquiry about it of any kind. The telegram could go, and my blessing with it. Whatever the issue, I would be well out of this business, for I was certain that I was among men who would stop at nothing. I felt that murder, with Rathouse, would be a small item in his day's work, if anyone got in his way; and the fact that the police camp was not far off did not cheer me in the slightest.

I had a number of visitors that day, and played the sick ingenuous youth to the best of my ability. Mrs. Jeppe was all for cooking me special dishes, but I told her, with the greatest politeness, that I had placed myself unreservedly in the hands of Miss Lorenzo. That young woman gurgled delightedly on hearing this ; she was not aware of the reason underlying my announcement. But the truth of the matter was that I felt I could not be altogether sure of Mrs. Jeppe ; she was too impassive, too resigned, too stonily calm. And she was Reitz's sister, and had bonded a portion of her land in order to come to Grasfontein and make her fortune. If an impertinent young man were going to stand between her and riches, a dose of ground glass. . . . Natives, if provoked, often did that ; they mixed it with the sugar, and results were certain. Handy people, natives ; you could blame anything on them. . . . Mrs. Jeppe, I felt, could be like that famous female poisoner in the history of crime who carefully nursed her victims. She was capable, I was convinced, of laying out my corpse in the most sympathetic manner, shedding the fitting tear, and uttering the fitting platitude. . . . I was taking no risks.

"Now, here you are, everything as easy as easy," said Reitz jovially, coming into the tent and sitting down, tailor-wise, on the earth. "Getting a rest, and we chaps sweltering it out, by God ! How you feeling ?"

"Fed up," said I, playing my own game. "Thinking of clearing right out. I've had about enough of the diggings."

"Going back to bonnie Scotland?"

"Oh, perhaps," I said wearily.

"Gee," said he, "you know, you mustn't lose heart like that, Lewis. You mustn't lose heart. Though I've had a presumption you'd be wanting home. Gee, it's that homesickness. It gets a man, Lewis! God, it *gets* a man!"

"It don't get 'im 'alf so well as a club on the 'ead, though," said Miss Lorenzo fiercely.

I flashed her an appealing look, and frowned.

"Man, I'd have given a lot to go into Turffontein this afternoon," Reitz confided, ignoring Miss Lorenzo's thrust with splendid indifference. "Race day, you know. Saturday afternoon. Did I ever tell you about that dream, Lewis? Gee, that was a wonderful dream! Gee, that was one of the biggest presumptions I ever had! A voice said to me: 'Reitz, just follow the Fates.' Like that. And then I heard a crowd shouting: 'Jerroo wins! Jerroo wins!' See? And I sat up in bed, and I cried out, I was that excited! And Clara—my wife, you know, Lewis—she said to me: 'God, Archie,' she says, 'what you shoutin' about and bangin' me on the back for?' That was before we was married, Lewis. Some time." He cleared his throat, quite unabashed. "I said to her: 'Clara,' I said, 'I'm going straight to Turffontein races,' I said, 'for Jerroo is going to win, and I'll put your pyjamas on that horse,' I said. So I went, and when I got there I see the crowd, and I see an old friend of mine among the people. So I said to him: 'What's running?' I said. Just like that. Then I see in the list of horses, 'Jerusalem,'

right on top. 'Gee,' I said, 'Jerroo wins. That's him for sure.' Then I look down and see another horse, 'Jerusha.' 'Christ,' I said, 'what am I to do? I fancy *Jerusalem*. Jerusalem the golden.' 'See here, Archie,' said my pal, 'that's a dud horse, that is. You don't want to back him,' he said. 'You want to back *Jerusha*. Gee, man, that's some horse,' he said. 'Gee,' he says, 'back that horse and you'll go rolling home like a blinking lord.' "

"And did you?" asked Miss Lorenzo.

"Man," said Reitz brokenly, "I *backed* that horse! One hundred pounds! God! And there the horses were off—'Potato Pie' leading, 'Crimson Belle' next, and then 'Jerusalem.' Where was 'Jerusha'? Gee, that horse was *crawling*. They went on—'Crimson Belle' first, 'Potato Pie' behind now, 'Spot Light' and 'Dangerous Age' coming on as fast as fast! And there was 'Jerusha' with my hundred quid on him, just damn well taking the air! Then 'Jerusalem' got ahead of the others. There he goes! Oh, man, how that horse ran! Gee, what a horse! And the crowd shouted: '*Jerroo wins! Jerroo wins!*' And God! he passed the post by four lengths!" He mopped his brow. "Naw!" cried Miss Lorenzo, sympathetic in spite of herself.

"Yes," said Rathouse, putting his head round the opening in the tent, and leering at Miss Lorenzo.

"You didn't 'ave a premonition young Mr. Lewis was goin' to 'ave 'is skull cracked, did you?" asked Miss Lorenzo, bridling instantly.

Rathouse came over to Miss Lorenzo, put an experienced arm round her, and gave her a gentle hug.

"Quit that," she spat out viciously.

But Rathouse was clever. He had perceived that I had a staunch ally, and was determined to weaken her.

"Look at her, Lewis! Blushing!" he said wheedlingly. "I love 'em wild like this! Lord, how I don't half take to 'em when they get fractious."

"Mr. Lewis!" said Miss Lorenzo imploringly.

"Oh, Mr. Lewis!" mocked Rathouse. "Mr. Lewis has grey-blue eyes, hasn't he? 'Two eyes . . . of grey,'" he began to hum. "Yes, blue-grey eyes. But my eyes are blue, too, and blue eyes are wonderfully attractive to dark-eyed ladies, aren't they? Look at me, Juliana Lorenzo! Look at me, you spawn of a Cockney mother and an ice-cream johnny."

Miss Lorenzo began to howl.

"Rathouse, that will do," I said quietly.

But Rathouse had lost his temper. "Do you hear, Juliana? Lewis says that will do," he said scathingly. "Why the hell don't you come to me after dark, woman, when I can't see your face? Or have you lost your reputation to Bonnie Prince Charlie with the bandage?"

I rose unsteadily off my bed, and struck him on the mouth. "Clear out," I commanded.

He went, laughing. It was war between us, now—"war," as the boys' bloods say, "to the knife."

CHAPTER XXI

I STRIKE A POT HOLE

My convalescence was, happily, short ; I mended rapidly. Perhaps my determination to outwit the others was what helped me most. On Sunday, I was able to walk about a little, and on Monday morning reappeared at my old post on Mr. Darcy's claims. This sudden resurrection of mine seemed to give du Toit a little uneasiness ; he was all for sending me back to bed. But I was a most obstinate invalid. I felt far from well, but was determined to stick it out. That telegram surely *must* come. I could stand by and watch the washes for a day, at least ; the wire must put an end to things before Tuesday.

"I never seen anything to equal this," said Hoxie, surveying me, as I sat in the sun, an old hat perched gingerly on top of my bandaged head. "God, if you ain't exactly like a sick fowl, Lewis, just mopin' around like one of Henery the Eighth's wives, waitin' for the axe."

"That's what the Scots call being *dour*," said du Toit pleasantly ; and then he remarked sardonically : "The spirit that won Bannockburn !"

"Arise, Sir Robert the Bruce !" said Rathouse, tapping me on the shoulder with a stick.

"It was the de Boune whose head was split before Bannockburn," I reminded him. And then I added slyly: "Next time you feel like staging an accident scene, in these parts, please don't cast me as the victim. I can't say that I altogether like it."

But Rathouse was not to be drawn. He began whistling.

"Gee, Lewis, you're a bit hard on your pals," said Reitz sentimentally.

"The knock was pretty hard," I told him. "You wouldn't fancy a little tap like that just to give you a few quiet days with your wife, would you? Because I'm always obliging," I finished, and began humming.

Reitz was standing near me. "Gee, Lewis," he said concernedly, "*I* done nothing to you, man! A pal! God, *I* never done nothing!"

"Who the hell *said* you'd done anything?" Rathouse spat out irritably. "Lewis is being a little too funny, to my mind."

"Not at all!" said I, smiling. "The morning air, you know, and the joy of being with one's companions. Why," I wound up fatuously, "I'm like the song—just sitting on top of the world."

Hoxie sniggered. "You're sittin' on a ant heap, anyway," he informed me, "an' soon you'll know all about it. You'll be rollin' along, all right."

"Man," ejaculated Reitz earnestly, "that makes me think of the day I sat on a ant heap with a girl. Gee, she was a fine girl, Lewis, plump, and as blue in the eye as that sky." He put his head to the side and regarded me sadly. "God," he burst out

poetically, "that *was* a girl! Gee! By gee! We sat down on the veld, and there I had my arm about her, you know, and there we was sitting, and sitting, and sitting, and God! I was just saying what a influence she could be in my life, when at last she says to me: 'Archie,' she says, 'we're on a ant heap,' she says. And, man, there we were, and I'd never have noticed it if she hadn't have spoken."

We all guffawed, and this restored the party to a state of apparent good humour. It was no part of my intention to deliberately pick a quarrel; the veiled accusation, so cleverly ignored by Rathouse, had been felt by Reitz. Reitz was Rathouse's dupe; by skilful pressure, he could be made to give his brother-in-law away. I had been watching Rathouse very narrowly. He was angry with Reitz. As he smoked a cigarette, I saw him bite it with temper, and when a native, who was passing, knocked into him by mistake, he drew his hand sharply across the man's face.

It was then that my attention was drawn to the natives, for it had struck me, suddenly, that we were short-handed. I counted the boys, and the number came to eight. When du Toit had purchased the other three claims for Mr. Darcy, the number of boys had been increased to twelve.

"Where," said I, "are the other four boys?"

"Sacked," said du Toit. "My motto, you know, is 'Slow to hire, and quick to fire.'"

I asked him the reason for this wholesale dismissal.

"Cutting down expenses," he said briefly.

"Mr. Darcy's orders?" I inquired.

"Mr. Darcy," he said, "entrusts everything to me."

"But those boys are being overworked," I burst out. "Mr. Darcy would never permit such a thing!"

"Lewis," said he, quietly, "I shall be obliged if you will mind your own business."

If that wire would only come! Patiently I stood at my post until lunch time, when I boarded one of the trolley cars making a round of the diggings, and travelled to D portion, where I alighted, and asked some diggers to direct me to Rathouse's claim. After a great deal of fruitless searching, I at length found it, recognizing it instantly because the faces of the four natives who were sitting beside it, boiling a pot of mealie meal, were familiar to me. I asked one of the boys how long he had been there, and he said: "Since Friday, *baas*." There had been other boys, before that, they told me, but these other boys had gone when the *baas* Rathouse brought the new quartette from Mr. Darcy's claims. Cutting down expenses! I kicked the sod, fuming. Rathouse and du Toit, between them, were now working claims with Mr. Darcy's money, picks, shovels, sieves, and the washing-machine doubtless being supplied gratis. As for the natives, their hands were raw. Had they been mules, I might have appealed to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; being men, I could do nothing for them.

I took a trolley car round to my own claims on A, and spoke to my new friend, MacLachlan. He had been digging on a raised portion of ground above mine, and his luck had not altogether been out,

for he showed me a little aspirin bottle containing a few good stones, for which he had been offered he told me, two hundred pounds. I confided my troubles to him, then, as a pious monk might confide in his confessor, and announced my intention of working my claims. He was, of course, up in arms at the suggestion; the ground was worthless. "Midden heap," he said acidly. "Midden heap." Why wouldn't I take the advice of an old digger? I had too much money in my pocket, he considered; it was "waste—black waste." But, as I remained adamant, he at length consented to keep an eye on my boys for me, and lend me picks and shovels. The boys were to receive a pound a week, and MacLachlan a pound a day, and the hire of the little washing-machine on Friday would be seven shillings and sixpence. I had decided to wash on Friday, which was my off-day, as Reitz and Hoxie would then be on duty. MacLachlan was greatly puzzled as to why I would not throw up my overseer's post at Mr. Darcy's claims; but then, he was not in love. I could hardly explain to him that, quite apart from my obligation to Mr. Darcy, I had a very deep and vital interest in whatever concerned Miss Shirley. Moreover, I was engaged in secret detective work, that, although dangerous, was at least stimulating and interesting; and on top of all that, I was looking out eagerly for Mr. Darcy himself to appear upon the scene. For he *must* come, I felt.

That week seemed an endless one; the days crawled by. Every day I imagined that du Toit would receive orders from Mr. Darcy to cease the washes, and every day the crane swung to and fro,

and the washing continued. We took out a very fair number of diamonds, but as these were all confiscated by du Toit, I had no means of checking the amount, more especially as I was not always on duty. We worked in shifts ; Rathouse and I, and then Reitz and Hoxie. Du Toit spent his time strolling about, always elegantly attired, and smiling, smiling. I asked him what Rathouse was doing with Mr. Darcy's boys, and he merely favoured me with a benign grin. " You also may have four of Mr. Darcy's ex-servants, if, like Rathouse, you pay for them," he said softly. One could make no answer to that. I had no proof that Rathouse was not paying for his boys, and he knew it. He reminded me very much of a great, fat, over-fed Persian cat, playing with a mouse. " Lewis," he would say, " Lewis the young, the forensic, the fiery ! A wonderful race, the Scots. . . . Dour, yes. Clumsy, too. Thick in the ankle and the wit. But a wonderful people. . . ." Sometimes I longed to throttle him, or knife him—knife him in the belly as Ehud stabbed King Eglon in the Book of Judges. . . . A few more weeks of the diggings, and I would become a complete savage. I was beginning to forget that men and women really existed who bathed every day, and dined at tables spread with snowy cloths. I thought of Sunday afternoons in my home town ; church bells clanging monotonously, and women in tailor-mades carrying little hymn-books. I thought of the North Bridge, and the quiet quadrangle of the grey University ; and I thought of Princes Street, the " ting-ting " of tram bells,

the hum of the electric cables, the great, wide stretch of shops, the warm, inviting glow of the entrances of picture houses, and the raucous cry of street arabs crying: "Dis-patchanews, sir! Dis-patchanews!" It was like a far-off dream. But if Mr. Darcy failed me that week, Dame Fortune did not. A day after my boys started digging on what MacLachlan was pleased to call my "midden," they struck, six feet down, some flat-shaped river stones, of a wonderful dark green hue, polished like marble. This was the very best indication; my "midden" was part of the bed of a river that had flowed some hundreds of thousands of years ago. Each stone was worn smooth, and polished by the washing of the water. Old MacLachlan was scarcely less excited than I; we examined the stones, and believing we had come on a pot hole in the river bed, decided to sink a shaft, some twenty feet deep. I couldn't sleep for excitement that week. Worried as I was over Mr. Darcy's claims, and elated as I was over mine, I thought that an eternity passed before Friday at length came round, and I was free to wash.

When I took the first sieve from MacLachlan's hands, I was shaking from head to foot. We overturned it on a wet sack spread on the ground (I had no sorting-table or shed) and right in the centre glittered fully a dozen diamonds.

"Man!" cried MacLachlan, "ye've struck a pot hole!"

I think I almost went mad. The second sieve was overturned, and again it proved full of diamonds. I sat staring at them, turning them over in my hand,

half-dazed and crazed with sheer joy. Some of the diamonds were a pale amber, one was a delicate pink, but most of them were stones of the first water—bluish white, and clear. Again and again the sieve was overturned, and each time the gravel was dotted over with diamonds. By the end of the day, when the wash was completed, I had taken out stones which I afterwards sold for over one thousand pounds. My claim was besieged by visitors. Diggers came crowding round me, and every available inch round my ground was pegged. Much to my embarrassment, I found myself the lion of the hour, and hearing of my good fortune, Rathouse, Reitz, Hoxie, Mrs. Jeppe, Mrs. Reitz, and the faithful Miss Lorenzo, came tearing across from L to A, to see what all the fuss was about.

“Lewis ’as struck a pot hole!” everyone was shouting. “A chap called Lewis, working on A! Lewis! A chap called Lewis! Pot hole! Go over an’ see it. Man, he’s spoonin’ the diamonds out. Every sieve! Don’t know where ’e is, ’e don’t. Struck a pot hole! Pegged in a low-lyin’ bit o’ ground you wouldn’t look at, an’ struck a *pot hole!*”

My hand was wrung until I had to offer my left one, my right ached so badly. Everybody wanted to take a snapshot of me; girls came kissing me, and old women wept, and told me what a fine boy I was, and how I reminded them of their own sons. And then a pressman got hold of me. What did I think of the diggings? How long had I been in the Transvaal? Did I intend to sell out and leave Grasfontein? What was I going to do with my

money? Was I intending to settle in South Africa?

At the close of the day, about five o'clock, when I knocked off washing, a fat Jew, splendidly attired, alighted from a car and asked me if I would sell out the claim I had just been working. "Gif you a thousand for it, cash, on Monday, at Lichtenburg," said he.

"No," I said firmly.

"Fifteen hundred," he said impressively.

"No," I said decisively. "On no consideration."

"Sell out," said MacLachlan in my ear. "It's my opeenion that the best o' that claim's in the wee bottle ye're holdin', Lewis." And he winked at me pawkily.

"Two thousand," said the Jew calmly.

Two thousand! Two thousand, and no more risks! Two thousand pounds!

"Done," said I.

CHAPTER XXII

I HEAR STARTLING NEWS

It appeared to be the earnest desire of everyone on the diggings that day, that I should be made drunk. What with wine, good fortune, and a few stitches in my scalp, it was going to be no easy task for me to carry my head. But the man who rescued me from my difficulties, ironically enough, was none other than du Toit. My sudden fortune seemed to make him neither envious nor elated ; he remained calm as a priest, and suave as a waiter. Acting on his advice, I sold my diamonds that same afternoon, to several buyers, having been assured by a number of diggers that the price I would get for them at Grasfontein would probably be as good as any I was likely to secure elsewhere in the country. Taking the stones to England appeared to me too risky a game to play. If I attempted to smuggle them in, as so many tried to do, I stood a grave chance of being caught ; if I paid duty on them, I would lose a handsome sum of money I could ill spare. It would be wisdom, I considered, to turn my wares into hard cash as speedily as possible. Accordingly, I took my finds to the Mining Commissioner on the field, and had the stones weighed and registered, after which pro-

ceeding a certificate was issued to me to the effect that the diamonds were lawfully mine. Du Toit and MacLachlan then accompanied me to the buyers' huts at Treasure Trove, where I exchanged my stones for notes amounting, in all, to one thousand and twenty pounds. Most of the buyers were Jews, but du Toit was able for them ; du Toit knew the value of each diamond to the last penny. He watched the buyers weigh the stones, and then weighed them himself ; and there was nothing he did not know about the colour of a diamond in relation to its market value. When the deal was over, I expected that du Toit would demand a very considerable commission on the sales ; but to my surprise, he proposed we should go straight to Johannesburg, and visit Mr. Darcy.

Now, here was an odd situation indeed ! To say that I was puzzled, perplexed, dumbfounded and ashamed, goes without saying. And yet I felt, despite everything, that I had had grave cause to doubt this man who was now acting as guardian and friend. Perhaps it would be as well for me to face Mr. Darcy ; he, too, owed me some explanation, since he had engaged me on a task that was plainly beyond an amateur and a tenderfoot, and then left me in my dilemma to think what I might choose. If I had wronged du Toit, the fault lay with Mr. Darcy. I would not mind seeing my employer, for I had a few words for his private ear. . . . There was, of course, Shirley. . . .

"I heard there was a special train to-night," du Toit remarked. "Somewhere about seven-thirty. No use of your hanging about here. You'll

be mobbed, and expected to throw money about like water. We'd better get into Lichtenburg at once."

I begged to be allowed the luxury of a change of clothing and a wash.

"You can get a bath and a shave at Lichtenburg," said du Toit practically. "Get your traps, and be quick."

I went to my tent, leaping over the ground with joyous hops, skips and jumps.

"I'm going to Joh'burg," I called out gaily to Miss Lorenzo. "We shall get there in the early hours of the morning."

"Goad!" she cried, her face falling. "I knew it, Mr. Lewis! And you'll never come back no more?"

"Oh, I'll come back," I assured her. "I own two claims still, if you remember."

"I thought you'd 'ave stood us a slap-up dinner," she said wistfully.

"By all means!" I cried willingly. "Take all your friends to whichever café you please, and tell the proprietor to send the bill to me. And let me know," I added, rummaging for a clean shirt, and taking my one and only respectable pair of trousers from the press, "what you would like as a present."

I was just in peril of the lady's becoming too demonstrative, when Nigel Percy looked round the open flap of the tent, and wrung my hand. I had not seen him for about a week, what with my sickness and my digging affairs, and he looked weedy and ill.

"It's wonderful news, Lewis," he said in his

modulated, cultured voice. "I'm so glad it happened to *you*."

I thought his face looked particularly grey and pinched, beneath the tan.

"Cheer up, Percy," I said, slapping him on the back, "I'm not forgetting my friends. And I hope," I added lamely, "if you won't feel offended, that you'll let me dig you out of this hole and send you back to England."

"Would you do that, Lewis?" he asked in a strange, cracked voice.

"Of course," I said, trying to conquer my own self-consciousness, and appear as though I did not notice his embarrassment.

"It's so—so kind of you, Lewis," he said at length, shyly picking up some of my clothing and putting it into my valise for me. Then he added, in a normal tone of voice: "Some godless devil has left a donkey lying with a broken leg, all day, over on J. Have you got a revolver, Lewis? One wants to do the humane thing."

I bent down under my bed, and lifted Shirley's automatic.

"You can have that," I told him, "and I can get it from you when I come back." I pressed a few pounds into his hand. "And see that you eat to-night, Percy," I warned him, as I strapped my valise and ran off.

Du Toit and I caught one of the motor buses that ply between the diggings and Lichtenburg, and we were into the little dorp by half-past six. We made tracks immediately for the chief hotel and for quite a quarter of an hour I revelled in a

hot bath. While in the bath, the thought came to me that, in the event of any underhand dealing, it would be perhaps unwise for me to be carrying notes about to the value of one thousand and twenty pounds. The little bank was closed ; I could not deposit my valuable scraps of paper there. When I had dressed, however, I went out in search of a lawyer. Business hours were over, but a lady in the street directed me to the private address of a solicitor. This man was English, and courtesy itself ; he left his house, accompanied me to his offices, and relieved my mind very considerably by giving my money asylum in his safe. " You don't appear to trust your friends," he remarked banteringly. " Do you, then, trust me ? "

We shook hands, laughing, and when I returned to the hotel I found du Toit had been looking for me. " Were you at the barber's ? " he enquired curiously.

" At a lawyer's," said I. " Second nature, you see. I am a lawyer's son."

He grinned broadly. " Then you are no longer worth robbing ? " he said jestingly. But there was a curl in his lip that I did not altogether like.

" Perhaps not," I said amiably, " but I still have enough on me to pay for a very good meal, and a bottle or two of the choicest wine. But first of all I must go to the barber's for a shave and a hair-cut."

The hairdresser was as garrulous and excited as a Frenchman ; it was a great pleasure to him, he assured me, to shave the man who had just struck

a pot hole. "And I see," said he, "that you're under police protection."

I asked him to explain himself.

"That gentleman du Toit," he said.

I started up, and the razor very nearly slashed across my face. "Du Toit?" I cried. "What do you know about du Toit?"

"Du Toit's a 'tec," said he, showing some surprise at my ignorance. "Didn't you know that?"

I sat, transfixed. Then the humour of the situation forced itself upon me, and I burst out laughing. Merciful heavens, how Mr. Darcy must have been chuckling over my communications!

"Mum's the word, mind you," said the barber. "I'm only tellin' you what I hear. But I've heard from scores that du Toit's just hangin' around Grasfontein ropin' in illicit diamond buyers by the dozen. The I.D.B. goin' on in these parts is somethin' crool. I only heard from a chap last week how he seen du Toit stop six natives on the road to Mafeking. Mafeking—the natives can dig for diamonds there, you know. Not like here, sir. It's different. Different laws, sir. Mafeking's in Bechuanaland. Native Protectorate. But the natives steal and buy the diamonds here, and then dig them out of their claims at Mafeking. I reckon you can't beat the native for thieving, sir. This chap told me he was certain it was du Toit he seen takin' dozens of diamonds off them natives one Sunday. He's always at Grasfontein of a Sunday, du Toit is. Somethin' pretty big in the Criminal Investigation Department, I reckon. You can

always spot them 'tecs. Their boots is too well brushed, even down at the diggings."

I thanked my barber for his information, paid him for his services on the generous scale expected of the finder of a pot hole, and returned to the hotel. When I entered the dining saloon, I surprised du Toit in the act of eating a lavish helping of roast pork and apple sauce, two bottles, one of Jeripico, and the other of Van der Hum, on the table beside him.

"My taste in wines," said he, "and I'm carrying the bottles away with me. Do you fancy roast pork with a glass of Van der Hum?"

I smiled, and said stoutly: "I do not, sir! I have been respectably brought up, and honour my digestion."

"Ah, that's the worst of you English!" cried du Toit, chuckling softly. "So busy honouring this and that, you never have any time to enjoy yourselves! Honouring the flag, honouring the seventh commandment, honouring the belly. . . . Anything more cramping to one's intellectual freedom than this honouring, I simply cannot imagine. If I choose to pollute my guts, Lewis, is anyone or anything going to prevent my doing so? But you English! You go about with your consciences in one hand, and a bottle of fruit salts in the other. It is worse than tyranny."

I told him that evidently he hadn't thought so much of my company that he couldn't think to begin the meal without me.

"I argued the matter out, Lewis," he said softly. "Sit down, young man! I said to myself: 'Shall

the appetite of a Dutchman await the pleasure of a Scotsman's beard ? ' The answer was most strongly in the negative."

I beckoned a waiter, and ordered some soup. As I sat absently fingering the cutlery on the table, and moving the flower vases aside, someone shouted out from the direction of the door : " Is Lewis 'ere ? Lewis, the chap that struck the pot hole on A."

I turned sharply round in my chair, and recognized a familiar figure threading its way among the tables, and bearing down upon us quickly.

" Hoxie," I cried in surprise.

He came striding up, took his Tom Mix hat off his head, and crammed it playfully on mine. " My God, Lewis," he burst out, " was it you gave Percy your barker ? "

I told him quickly, yes. " He wanted to shoot a donkey," I explained. But I had jumped to my feet, and was trembling like a woman.

" Garn ! " said Hoxie, grinning, " the only donkey 'e went out to shoot was 'isself ! An' a good job, too ! 'E wasn't no damn good to nobody, that chap wasn't. I reckoned from the first that that fellow was a suicide, sure. Sooner or later. Who found 'im, d'ye think ? Archie Reitz. Lyin' beside the latrines, 'e was, with 'alf 'is bloody 'ead shot off."

" The latrines ? " said du Toit, vastly amused. " Do you tell me the fellow shot himself at the latrines ? But how convenient ! Why didn't you shove him in right away, and say the burial service ? " Hoxie roared.

" After all," resumed du Toit, " when a chap sets out to commit suicide, he has a large choice of

suitable sites for the operation. But to select the latrines! I consider this a most diverting suicide, Lewis."

I felt too sick for speech.

"We fellows ran to 'is girl, to tell 'er," said Hoxie, "an' when we got to that little sandbag 'ut of theirs, there she lay, dead as mutton! She's died of dysentery, an' that bloke Percy 'ad never said a bloody word! Doctor came, an' 'e says she'd been dead a whole twenty-four hours. An' 'im walkin' about, too, and talkin' to Lewis about shootin' donkeys! Some chaps, there, is makin' a coffin for 'er out of some packin' cases, and they'll bury 'er to-morrow, I reckon. An' about time, too! As for 'im, 'e'll have to go through a hinqest."

Hoxie lifted the Jeripico, and poured himself out a glass. "When's your train?" he asked affably.

"Du Toit," said I, "we can't go on to Joh'burg *now*."

"And why not?" inquired du Toit, raising his brows.

"I must see that my friends have decent burial, surely," I said unsteadily.

Du Toit laughed. "Lewis is enjoying himself, Hoxie," he said, smiling. "Nothing pleases the Scots more than a funeral. Gives them the chance of a gude sermon, and a gude glass, and an excuse for playing that melancholy dirge called the 'Flowers o' the Forest.' I perceive that Lewis is altogether in his element. Why should we deny him an evening's pleasure? I vote we all go round to the undertaker's, and ask him if he has a spare coffin to sell for the deceased lady. The spectacle of the pot

hole finder returning to the diggings on a tumbril, with a coffin for company, is one that will appeal strongly to my sense of humour."

Hoxie guffawed loudly, and then patted my shoulder. "Don't take it to 'eart, Scotty," he said kindly. "I reckon, although you've struck a pot hole, you ain't cut out to be a digger."

"Cut out to be a grave digger, however," said du Toit. "Shall we buy that coffin, Lewis?"

I nodded, and we went out.

CHAPTER XXIII

I BECOME A GRAVE DIGGER

THE undertaker's establishment to which we were directed proved to a rambling house with a Dutch gable, the domicile of a patriarchal cabinet-maker, who had retired from business these many years. Whereas he had at one time made coffins for a livelihood, it was now said of him that he made them for pleasure, the machinery and methods of modern undertakers, and the convenience and gentility of funeral parlours, having long since deprived him of trade. It was dark when we knocked on his door and made our strange request. Had he a spare coffin for sale? It appeared that he had. With firm tread, this gaunt, wiry, white-bearded prophet led us across the little hall of the house, and through a door that gave on to a wide, bare yard, at the far end of which was a shed. This served, apparently, as a workshop. He set down his lantern, felt in his pocket for a key, and unlocked the door, beckoning us to follow. Upon the floor, lying lengthwise across the back of the shed, was a coffin of gigantic proportions, and over this monument of conscientious and solid workmanship he reverently paused. He was in the habit of supplying the residents on out-

lying farms with coffins, he said ; people who knew him appreciated the high standard of his handiwork, and the wise and frugal, according to ancient custom, purchased their coffins and kept them in their houses, against that awkward emergency, Death. In a country where burial had to follow twenty-four hours after death had taken place, the obvious thing, he argued, was to have one's coffin in the house ; a Dutch *vrouw* of the name of Van Tyl, now enjoying perfect health, had ordered hers a few months ago ; and now, here it was. She was a handsome woman, he informed us, a fact I did not doubt when looking at the size of the coffin. He had put his best workmanship upon the chest, for the *vrouw* was a customer of sterling character, and having buried three husbands was becoming a connoisseuse on coffins, and could tell a good piece of work when she saw it. As it was unlikely she would pass away before a duplicate coffin had been made, however, he would, by way of an obligation, sell the model now on view. This information was imparted to me in Dutch, du Toit acting as interpreter. The interview ended in my buying the coffin and driving back with it to Grasfontein on a hired Ford lorry, du Toit seated beside me nursing his bottle of Van der Hum, and Hoxie sitting on the chest behind, playing a mouth organ.

In judging Mrs. Jeppe to be a woman whose death-chamber services would always be eagerly sought by all newly bereaved persons, I had not been in error. Like Sarah Gamp, she undoubtedly had an eye for a good corpse. When I arrived upon the scene, the

respectable thing had already been done by the deceased lady Leslie ; I was told she looked extremely well, and the fact that I did not go and view the corpse, now that it lay, resplendent, in one of Miss Lorenzo's nightgowns, was a severe disappointment to many. Miss Lorenzo mistook my silence for indifference. The death of Percy's Leslie had been a great shock to her, she was at pains to assure me, only one thing about the demise being really satisfactory ; *rigor mortis* had set in, the doctor had remarked, almost twenty-four hours ago. Never would Miss Lorenzo forget the obstinacy displayed by the corpse of her mother, limp in spite of tears, prayers, camphor. . . .

I slept soundly that night, worn out by the excitements, happy and tragic, of the past twelve hours. The following morning, Rathouse, Reitz, Hoxie and I, buried the lady Leslie (to this day I do not know what her surname was) in a little patch of veld at Grasfontein that had, of necessity, been converted into a graveyard. Jan and two other natives dug the grave, and the coffin was lowered by Rathouse and me. As I stood at the head of the crude pit, staring absently down at the bright, terracotta earth, I chanced, suddenly, to raise my head, and at that instant caught Rathouse looking at me. There was that in his glance that gave me just cause for entertaining the most acute apprehension ; swift as it had been, it served to reveal to me, once for all, the trend his feelings had definitely taken. I had unsuspectingly caught him unawares, a cat calculating its spring, an eagle preparing to swoop. He had been studying me, measuring me, sizing up

his man, weighing his chances against mine. There was all that in his glance, and much more ; and I was not to be deceived. He was awaiting some opportunity, biding his time, and watching, watching. . . . Immediately he had averted his gaze, I also looked away. But I did not forget.

Hoxie, obeying the promptings of instinct, and Rathouse, following the dictates of intelligence, had maintained, throughout the proceedings, a decent silence. But something was stirring within the breast of Reitz. That fatal love of soap-box oratory, inherent in the backvelder, and the melodramatic tendencies which invariably accompany it, had got the better of him. Already a band of people, white and black, had gathered round us, and were staring curiously at the open grave. Reitz had his subject, and he had his audience. Speak he must.

"Ladies and *gentlemen*," he shouted, "we are here gathered together in the sight of God and Mr. Lewis, here, who is British, to bury this unfortunate British woman. Ladies and gentlemen, let this be a lesson to us ! Here lies a woman who, if she had lived, might have ended on the gallows. But God, in His great mercy—"

He got no further. I do not wish to criticize Reitz too harshly ; he was one of a family of sixteen, dragged up in a tiny dorp, and his schooling had been of the scantiest. The principal part of his education had been derived from fourth-rate American cow-boy films, viewed by him in the lowest café-bioscopes. When he made his speeches, he delivered them with the innocence and simplicity

of a native. I had never interfered with him, at any time, when he held forth on the diggings ; but this was an occasion for speedy action. I growled : " Shut up," under my breath, and when, apparently mistaking my words, he began again on God's grace in cheating the hangman, I placed my hand over his mouth, and held it there.

" Lewis," he spluttered, " I never done you no harm, man."

I had fully expected that he would commence a free fight ; but to my surprise, he became suddenly quiet. Since the discovery of the pot hole, I had noticed that Reitz had become unusually deferential to me.

According to what, I believe, is a Dutch custom at country funerals, each man took a spade and helped to fill in the grave. All the time he was shovelling, Reitz kept edging near me, muttering to himself, and uttering platitudes. " God, Lewis, you don't know how I feel things, man ! Always a friend of yours, Lewis ! Always a friend ! " It seemed to get on Rathouse's nerves, for at length he paused in his labours and said between set teeth : " By heaven, I'll settle with you, yet." This had an instantaneous effect ; Reitz never said another word. I looked at Hoxie, but Hoxie appeared neither to hear nor see what was going forward. We completed our task, and returned to our tents without further argument.

I had intended going to Johannesburg that afternoon, but was asked to attend the inquest on Percy, to be held on Monday ; I also had to arrange with the authorities for his body to have decent burial, at

my expense. Another coffin having been procured from a different undertaker at Lichtenburg, and there being no doubt as to the manner in which death had occurred, I was permitted to inter the body on Sunday morning. This funeral I had perforce to organize myself, with the help of Jan, and two other natives. Rathouse, Reitz, Hoxie, and du Toit, had gone off for the day, du Toit remarking that at such a time he did not care to interfere with my pleasures. I spent the afternoon in my tent in slumber, for digging a grave in the hot sun is tiring work. But when the night came, I could not sleep as a result of my siesta. I was restless and wakeful, and kept tossing from side to side, thinking of my sudden fortune, my father, Shirley, poor Percy. . . . A hundred thoughts and ideas crowded in upon me. I must have been lying awake for hours, when, of a sudden, I became conscious of the sound of breathing. I listened, my whole body rigid, every muscle taut. Yes, there it was ! Someone was creeping round my tent. It was so dark that I could not see my hand before my face. No blackness imaginable can equal the utter pitch of a moonless African night. I might have been in a pit instead of a tent ; I might have been blind. From the position of my canvas bed, however, I knew the direction of the flap-door of the tent ; I could gauge the distance between me and it to an inch. Someone was touching the flap ; another minute, and it would be unfastened. Stealthily as a cat, I moved cautiously off my bed, and dived under the canvas at the back of the tent, thereby reversing the position, for I was now outside, and my nocturnal guest had already entered. I

then took my torch from my pocket, walked round to the door of the tent, and flashed the light full in the face of my visitor.

I found myself confronted with two very interesting things—a woman, and a loaded revolver.

CHAPTER XXIV

I ENTERTAIN A LADY

CURIOSLY enough, the disturber of my peace proved to be Billie. She was clad in a shimmering gown of bright jade, covered with scaly-looking beads that made one think of fishes, and over it was draped a dark cloak. She was panting, and the pupils of her eyes were dilated ; but her cheeks (because of paint, I suppose) were an even, blush-rose tint, and her mouth was the colour of cherries. In the light of my torch she was a strange, but not unlovely little figure. The hand holding the revolver was feminine; the bare arm, against the flung-back cloak, white and shapely.

" Mister Lewis ! " she cried, startled.

" You come dressed," said I, advancing cautiously, and then, with a quick movement, knocking down the hand that clutched the revolver. " I'll trouble you not to be so particular about *Mister* Lewis when paying such an informal call," I added grimly.

" Do you think I wanted to shoot *you* ? " she gulped, in a hoarse little voice. " I'm scared out of my life. I've walked right over from D portion, in this darkness, *alone*. Oh, Lewis, you can't put me out ! That man will kill me."

" What man ? " said I, indifferently.

"Put that torch out," she said hysterically. "You'll have him after me! Jim, of course. *Jim.*"

"Ah," said I, "Rathouse?"

She said in a whisper: "Yes," and sat down on my bed.

I regarded her coldly for a few seconds, and then said quietly: "Give me that gun, if you please."

She delivered it over without a word. "You'll let me stay here, Lewis?" she said, wheedlingly.

I snorted. "Humph," said I, "most certainly not! Do you think I am in the habit of sharing my tent with young women? I am about to escort you to the tent occupied by Miss Lorenzo and her niece Joanna."

"You're not," she said incredulously, and then her voice grew angry. "Do you think Juliana Lorenzo is going to hear how Jim has been treating me? It would make her very happy, of course. What a lot of horse sense you've got!" She began to cry. "Tell the Lorenzo woman where I've been, and have it all over the diggings! Rathouse will strangle me, and you don't care, you coward!"

"Well," said I, "Jim Rathouse has apparently not knocked the spirit out of you, at any rate. And is it my fault that you elected to live with such a man? I should have imagined that a girl of your experience would have realized that drunkenness and blows would be part of the programme, with him."

"A lot you know about it!" she flung at me bitterly. "A girl's got to get her living. I was a waitress in a Joh'burg Café. Nine pounds a month, and seven had to go on lodgings! And the hours!

And think of the heat ! Staggering around in a black man's country with trays of food for gentlemen like you ! ”

“ Is it money you want ? ” I asked quietly.

“ No,” she said fiercely, “ I want to stay here for the night.”

“ Blackmailing to follow at dawn,” I remarked leisurely. “ I wasn't born yesterday, you know.” I had been studying her. She was neither dishevelled, nor was there a single bruise on her arm. Rathouse had never laid a finger on her ; of that I was certain. She was dressed for her part, and was acting superbly. But already she had lost her case. She had never been a waitress ; she had apparently forgotten, when trying to impress upon me the hardness of her lot, that she had previously described to me, in detail, her life as a chorus girl. One portion of her story being untrue, I doubted all the rest of it. “ If you and your confederates are hoping that a certain sum of money, paid down cash, will prevent Mr. Darcy from knowing that Lewis has been keeping a woman in his tent, you may abandon the scheme,” I warned her. “ I fancy Mr. Darcy is a man of some intelligence, who would accept the truth from me.”

“ Faugh,” she said caustically, “ your reputation will be the death of you, Lewis. One would think, to hear you, that there was a green mamba or a scorpion in this tent ! Put me out if you like ! ” She began to sob afresh. “ Oh, what do *I* care ? ” And with a great show of abandon she prostrated herself on the camp bed, and buried her face in my pillow.

"Well," said I, not unkindly, "give me my coat, Billie. This is a draughty floor, and I am fairly cold."

"Nobody asked you to sleep on the floor," she said tartly.

"Nevertheless," said I, "give me my coat." And I put out my torch, lighted a candle, and wrapping my coat about me, opened a book and began to read.

"What you reading?" she inquired curiously.

"Never mind. I won't be disturbed, so I warn you not to talk."

"You won't slip out and leave me?" she asked. "I'm terrified of natives, Lewis. A girl might be murdered."

"No," I assured her, "I'll not slip out and leave you. But don't talk, if you please."

"I'm hungry," she said. "Haven't you got a biscuit?"

I ignored the remark.

"Haven't you, now? Just *one*?"

There was a biscuit box in the corner of the tent. I presented it to her without a word, and resumed my book. She munched and munched for nigh on an hour, and then, growing weary of my silence, wrapped the blankets about her, and went to sleep. Thinking that she might be cold, I tiptoed across and put my macintosh over her; and very pretty and innocent she looked, as she slept. Having warm, young blood in my veins, I was somewhat glad she did not stir. . . . Her breathing was calm and regular; she had curled herself up like a 'possum, one hand under her cheek. I lay down on the

ground again, blew out the light, and listened, in the darkness, to the barking of dogs, the sound of a woman's voice scolding, the mournful, piteous bray of a donkey, the despairing roar of a caged lioness. . . . I wondered, foolishly, if Shirley slept with her hand under her cheek, and began composing letters to my father, and conjuring up amazing scenes. Failure in love I did not dare contemplate ; but at one o'clock in the morning, when lying awake, it is wonderful how one steps from one glittering triumph to another. " Dear Father," I saw myself writing, " I have just made some three thousand pounds on the diamond fields, and hope to arrive home shortly with my wife." I smiled fatuously. What a sensation I was going to cause ! How my father would adore his daughter-in-law ! How she would sit in the drawing-room, and spread those irreproachable legs of hers forth to the blazing hearth ! And how she would hop up and down stairs, and have every servant her slave. . . . I smiled and smiled, into the darkness. Wallowing in a bath of impossible sentimentalism and nonsense, I sighed and fell into a deep, happy sleep.

On this occasion, I am uncertain how long I slept, but when I awoke to what might be semi-consciousness, I felt someone's hand at my belt. This impression, however, was extremely vague. I dozed off to sleep again, the thought dimly crossing my mind that it was seven o'clock, and time for me to awake to the bleakness of another rainy morning, and school. I would *not* wake. As a boy, it had been a habit of mine to play the coward and dream pleasantly on, until the sharp voice of my father's

housekeeper said harshly : " Talbot Lewis, it's ten minutes to eight, young sir ! " I stirred, and grunted, and the hand touched me for the second time. The " ten minutes to eight " must surely be coming now, I thought hazily. And then suddenly, in a flash, I was awake, and remembered. I had a belt round my waist containing three of my best diamonds (I had not sold these) and fifty pounds in notes. And someone had touched me, *was* touching me, fumbling at my belt. . . . I sprang up, in a perfect frenzy of anger and fear, and caught hold of someone or something that was struggling and kicking like an animal. " Let me go ! " a voice shrieked in the darkness—a voice I recognized instantly as Billie's.

" Not a bit of it ! " I cried angrily. " And so it was merely common theft, was it ? I heard you arriving to do the deed, and surprised you by ducking under the canvas, and greeting you at the front door. Then you delayed action again. Evidently think I'm worth robbing, do you ? " I had both arms round her, and lifting her off her feet, thrust her down on the canvas bed. " Don't dare stir," I shouted. " I'm going to get a light."

She ceased struggling, and I struck a match and lit the candle, switching on the light of my torch also, and pulling down the little lever that kept it alight. On a sudden, she made a dart and tried to pass me, but I caught her, and flung her down again.

" Lie there," I commanded. " Move, and I tie you to that bed."

She cried : " Oh, help, help," and I put my hand over her mouth.

"You'll call that once too often," I cautioned. "Do you want the police here? Here's a comical situation—a woman crying for help after trying to rob a man of his diamonds."

"I wasn't," she choked.

"Merely admiring me in my sleep, I suppose." I lifted the torch, and as I did so, my eye caught the glitter of something on the bare earth. I stooped and picked the object up. It proved to be a diamond, a stone weighing, I should say, about three carat. Amazed, I stared at it incredulously. This diamond was not mine. I looked down, and to my complete bewilderment found that the whole floor of the tent was strewn with diamonds.

"Now, what the devil—" I began. But she was attempting to rise, and I had to hold her down.

"Those diamonds aren't yours!" she cried defiantly. "You're a thief! Don't dare touch them!"

"We'll settle who is the thief presently," said I, between clenched teeth, struggling to keep her arms down. "Move again, and you're going to be tied!"

For answer, she raised her neck and gave me a long and lingering bite on the upper part of my left arm. Her teeth were sharp as a dog's, and I could have yelled with pain. I thanked heaven that I had emptied her revolver before going to sleep, for her mood was dangerous. It was not as though one could handle her roughly. There she lay, her pliant, woman's body undoing the strong man in me. She could kick and bite, but it was impossible to hit back. I settled the matter by taking a coil of rope and lashing her to her bed. Then I went carefully

over the ground and collected the scattered diamonds.

"You're a coward," she remarked, again and again, crying and sobbing, and making a great display of anguish. "What are you going to do with me?"

"That," said I, "is for you to decide."

"Why?" she demanded.

"I want to know how all these diamonds came to be scattered about my tent."

"They were in a little bag round my neck. You mauled me so much that the string broke and the bag burst, somehow," she gulped. "They're—they're—*my* diamonds."

"Try again," said I. "There's about eight hundred pounds' worth of stones, here. Where did you get them all?"

"I've told you they're mine."

"Do you go from man to man diamond stealing?"

"No. But naturally I get diamonds given me."

"You know very well that if you're caught with these on you, without a licence, you'll get run in," I warned her.

"And do you think that's going to make me hand them over?" she spat out indignantly.

"You'll be handing yourself over, if you don't look out," I reminded her. "For the last time, where did you get those diamonds?"

She was silent. Then, all at once, she burned her boats. "They're Rathouse's," she whispered.

"Eh?" I bent over her, and peered into her face.

"Yes." She nodded. "They're Rathouse's. . . . Will you let me go, now?"

"Rathouse sent you here to steal?"

"No." Her tone was scathing. "I took those from Rathouse. He was drunk. He had them round his waist. . . . They're Mr. Darcy's diamonds, if you want to know."

"How do you know they're Mr. Darcy's diamonds?"

"Oh, when Jim—when he'd been drinking—he talked, sometimes. You know what I mean. He had some of Mr. Darcy's boys pinching for him. . . . It was Jim who got one of the boys to knock you on the head, and I said at the time that it wasn't a clean game. He had Reitz in it. Reitz is tired of him; he hasn't got anything out of this. Reitz has been trying to go on your side. It's made Rathouse mad. He said this afternoon that he'd pretty soon clear Reitz off the diggings."

"How?" I said sharply.

"I don't know. That's what he said."

"Do you know anything about du Toit?"

"No," she said impatiently. "But there isn't anything to know about him. Rathouse can cheat him right under his nose, because du Toit's a fool."

"Perhaps" said I, "du Toit, like Lord Nelson, puts the telescope to the blind eye?"

She was silent. Then:

"I don't know what you mean," she said, "and I don't care. Let me go. I've told you everything."

I began to unloosen her bonds. "You can go when dawn comes," I promised, "and you'd better clear out and away as fast as ever you can before Rathouse gets hold of you. And meanwhile," I added, "the diamonds remain with *me*."

“Don’t give Rathouse away,” she implored;
“If he’s caught, I’m caught too ! And he’ll kill me,
Lewis ! He’ll kill me !”

I said quietly : “Leave Rathouse to me.”

CHAPTER XXV

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

BILLIE left me long before breakfast. It had been an unfortunate thing for her that she had sought shelter for the night in my tent ; Shirley Darcy's stolen property had been recovered, and the thief was now fleeing from the scene minus the booty. I was not one to take a stern, magisterial view of Billie's conduct ; life, with her, was too hazardous. She had risked flight clad in evening dress, when hundreds of pounds' worth of diamonds were upon her person, but when the dawn came, and the journey to Johannesburg had to be contemplated without the joyful possession of riches, her poverty terrified and unnerved her. She could not go to Rat-house's tent and collect her baggage ; her collection of the previous evening forbade that. I realized the awkwardness of her position, and gave her thirty pounds in notes, and my pull-over sweater. Both gifts were a dire necessity to her, for she was homeless, her purse was empty, and her evening gown of the scantiest. With her cloak about her, she shivered as I took her out in the cold dawn to look for a vehicle that would take her to Johannesburg. I led her to one of the gaming saloons, where I thought it might be possible to beg an early break-

fast, and we were just about to take some hot coffee when the curtain at the back of the shack was drawn back, and the sun-tanned, weather-beaten face of Hoxie peered out.

"Lewis!" he cried. "Damn my eyes!"

Billie had sprung to her feet, all anxiety and hysteria. "Is Jim there?" she whined. "Is Jim there, Alec?"

Hoxie ambled leisurely out, and surveyed her cynically. "No, Jim *ain't* here," he mimicked, and added, with the venom of the aggrieved lover, "an' don't come shoutin' for 'im, neither, you that was so stuck on 'im, an' went off with 'im, you—" He turned his back on her with a gesture of disgust, and spat dramatically on the floor.

"Hoxie," said I.

"Don't 'Oxie me," he cried impatiently. "Call me the most miserable swine on God's earth! That's all I ask, Lewis! An' take that—that—take 'er *away*." He looked at me queerly. "I ain't drunk," he finished indignantly.

I told him that, judging from his talk, he ought to be, and asked him what he was doing there. I was determined to take a high hand with him, for Billie's situation was desperate.

"What am I doin' 'ere?" He guffawed. "I like that, Scotty! Now, what are *you* doin' 'ere? This is where I sleep, damn ye! But where *you* been?" He flashed Billie a murderous glance.

I had quite forgotten that when Rathouse parted from us in company with Billie, Hoxie had cleared off to bachelor quarters in some gaming saloon. I had now marched right into the enemy's camp. It was

difficult for me to tell which line Hoxie would take ; after his assumed indifference at the nuptial flight of Rathouse and Billie, here he was breathing forth fire and brimstone with all the fervour of a spurned Victorian lover. That I was astounded goes without saying. I took a packet of cigarettes from my pocket, helped Billie to a cigarette, took one myself, and threw the remainder at Hoxie. He caught the packet and began to smoke without further remark. It was very early, and, save for a decrepit native boy who was sweeping the earthen floor with a yard broom, we had the place to ourselves. I finished my coffee and cigarette, and began to whistle in desultory fashion, awaiting Hoxie's opening move. But he made none.

Suddenly Billie began to sniff and sob artistically into a mauve handkerchief ; the fount of her tears was apparently seldom dry. Had I been in Hoxie's shoes, I believe that the sight might only have served to harden me ; but Hoxie was a primitive subject, and he was impressed by primitive melodrama. He kept looking furtively at Billie, and perceiving his interest in her was still strong, I decided to do my utmost to foster it.

"Hoxie," said I reproachfully, "it greatly surprises me that you should rail on the girl in such a way ! What the devil are you, now, that you can afford to bark at her like that ? Am *I* barking at her ? No !" The smugness of my tone would have done credit to a clerk in holy orders. "Good heavens, we all make mistakes. Because she went off with Rathouse, are you going to force her to stay with him ? Well, here she is. She's run away,

and has come begging me to get her off the diggings. And here we are, at this God-forsaken hour, looking for a motor, with the girl in terror of getting Rat-house after her."

Hoxie's brow had miraculously cleared. "She didn't need to go to *you*, Lewis," he said aggressively, and again he gave the weeping maiden a covert glance.

"Oh, Alec," gulped Billie.

"Eh?" said Hoxie.

"*Alec*," she repeated; and at this, he appeared thoroughly undone.

"Well, then," he remarked awkwardly.

"What was the use of looking for you, Alec? You wouldn't have—you wouldn't have—" She floundered, and then sighed heavily. "You wouldn't have *had* me," she finished resignedly.

"No, by God! I wouldn't!" he shouted. "Not temp'ry! I'm through with this muckin' around with women! You come with me, and you come *proper*. Magistrate's Court. Everythin' fixed up, and permanent. I'm gettin' sick of these dirty diggings. I want a cottage, an' some w'ite leg'orns. Always fancied poultry, Lewis. It's a job I've always took to." He crossed over and put a protective arm round Billie. "Come on, Steve! What you say to it?"

I myself certainly did not know what to say to it. This astonishing man was making a proposal of marriage! "You ain't exactly as you were when you came from your mother," I heard him say, "but when I'm taken with a girl, I'm *taken*. That's me. You ain't as you should be, an' I know it.

The only difference between me an' other chaps gettin' married is that they marry girls that ain't as they oughter be, an' the chaps *don't* know it. God, I've seen life, and that's the crimson truth, Lewis. What you gettin' when you marry? D'ye know? Not you! No chap does! But 'ere I am, an' I *do* know, an' there ain't goin' to be any w'ite-washin', neither. This ain't my first girl, an' I'm honest. There's been a power o' girls, an' that's straight. She ain't the first, but 'ere I'm tellin' 'er she's the last, an' a man can't say fairer."

I rose and thumped him on the back. "Hoxie," said I, "you're a decent chap, and there's my hand on it."

He gave my fingers a tight, affectionate squeeze. "Lewis," said he, "that's the most sensible thing I've 'eard you say since you been in these parts." He grinned. Billie was hanging on to him, the repentant Salvation Army lass, saved at the drum head. About her feelings towards him, I entertained the strongest doubt, though she appeared happy enough; but his emotion was genuine. I left them to their drama, and strolled out to the sunshine. Twenty-one hours ago, I had buried a comrade; a second one was now optimistically contemplating matrimony with a Magdalen. My sympathies, contrary to what might be imagined, were all with the Magdalen. I am not one of those who share the view held in American films dealing with fallen society women, that a cottage in the country, a gingham frock, and some cocks and hens strutting round the door, will effectively tame the wildest harlot into becoming a quiet house cat, who will

sit in front of the kitchen fire and purr. But it was not for such as I to destroy the divine trust and childlike confidence of my friend. A month—nay, two weeks of the white leghorns, and Billie would be drinking crème-de-menthe in a Johannesburg night club. . . . I walked away. There are times when one is glad that one cannot see the future. I saw that Billie would get to Johannesburg safely, and asked to know no more.

I breakfasted alone in a café, and went straight to Lichtenburg, where I attended the inquest held on the death of Percy, and afterwards saw the Jew who had purchased my claim. He handed the amount due to me to my lawyer, and it was quite two o'clock before my business was completed, and I returned to Grasfontein. I was met by the frenzied figure of Miss Lorenzo, who greeted me with that dramatic and expressive forcefulness so peculiar to her when faced with any unusual situation. "Goad," she was crying, "Goad, Mr. Lewis! Reitz 'as been arrested, an' they'll give 'im six months for this!"

"Six months for what?" I demanded sharply.

"'E was drunk as the lord last night, Mr. Lewis." (It was difficult to suppress a smile.) "'E was drunk as the lord, an' goin' round an' round on that merry-go-round. 'Back your fancy,' 'e's shoutin'. There 'e was, backin' 'em wooden 'osses, an' callin' 'em all by their names, an' round 'e goes till 'e ain't got a bean left in 'is pocket. Then the merry-go-round chap says to 'im: 'You get off,' 'e says. 'I ain't gettin' off,' says Reitz—drunk's the lord, ye know, Mr. Lewis. 'I ain't gettin'

off till this race finishes,' 'e says. 'I've put a power o' money on 'em 'osses.' There was a fellow standin' by, an' 'e says to the merry-go-round chap: 'Let 'im be,' 'e says, 'e's a racin' gent, 'e is. Got the blood of a English earl in 'im, 'e 'as. You let 'im be, on 'is grand stand, there! This is as good as Derby Day to 'im,' 'e says. 'Oh, 'e's got a earl in 'im, 'as 'e?' says the merry-go-round chap. 'I don't care if 'e's got the King in 'im, 'e ain't goin' to sit on my 'osses no longer.' An' there 'e dragged off Reitz, Mr. Lewis, an' Reitz goes to 'is tent shoutin' the diggins down! An' Goad! Mr. Lewis, when 'e got to the tent, what you think 'e does but 'ands over a full bottle o' whisky to a kaffir! Drunk's the lord, ye know, an' 'im not knowin' black from w'ite!"

"Well?" said I.

"Goad, Mr. Lewis, you know that givin' liquor to a native means six months in this country."

"If anyone's mean enough to tell," I remarked, for I had slipped many a glass of bass to thirsty Jan, or placed bottles in my tent, and tipped him a wink where to find them.

"Who was it told, Mr. Lewis?"

"Well, who?" I asked. And then I remembered Billie's words: "He says he'll clear Reitz off the diggings." I was on the point of crying out: "Rathouse!" but checked myself. "I've got to go and watch the washing," I remarked, and turned quickly on my heel. I had not seen Rathouse since Sunday morning. . . . I felt I could hardly trust myself to look at him.

As I came up to Mr. Darcy's claims, he was

standing by the washing-machine, smoking a pipe meditatively. He turned his head, took the pipe from his mouth, and favoured me with a broad grin.

"Brave cavalier," said he, "where you been?"

I told him, Lichtenburg.

"Lawyer?" said he.

"Among other things, yes." He little dreamed, I thought with satisfaction, that Billie's haul of diamonds was securely lodged in a safe.

"I say," he broke out genially, "seen my little girl?"

"Which?" I inquired, helping him turn over a sieve of grave on to the sorting-table.

"Your humour, Lewis, is that dry Scotch type I can't see much point in," he remarked. "I mean my little Billie, of course." He was, I thought, concealing his anxiety over the loss of his diamonds remarkably well.

"Seen her?" I echoed disinterestedly. "That reminds me, have you seen Hoxie? He should have been here."

"Have you seen Reitz?" he challenged boldly. "We seem the last of the old brigade. Of course, Lewis, between ourselves—" But he got no further, for at that instant something glittered, something large and white, and with a cry, he pounced on it, like a cat.

"*Lewis!*" he cried deliriously, as his right hand closed over it.

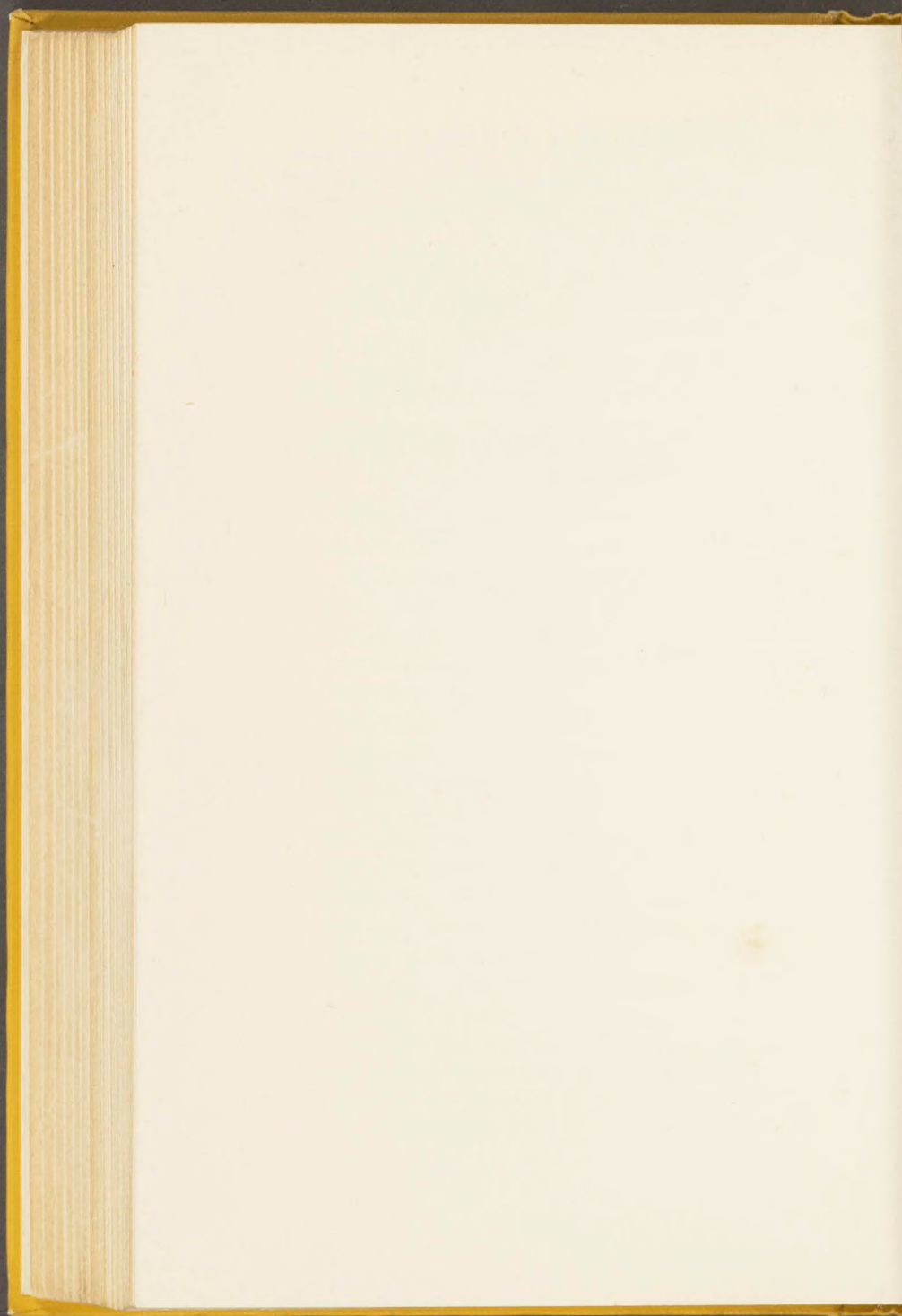
"Let me see it!" I shouted. I caught him by both wrists, and held him with all my strength. "Open your hand," I commanded. "Open it there! *Rathouse!*"

"Shut . . . your . . . bel . . . uddy . . . mouth," he said hoarsely, in my ear. "D'you want the whole diggings round us?"

"Open that hand!" The perspiration was standing in beads on my forehead. "Open it, or I'll order the natives to hold you!"

He smiled, and said softly: "Look!" Then the grip of the fingers relaxed, and slowly the hand opened.

I found myself staring at the largest diamond I had ever seen or dreamed of.



PART III



CHAPTER XXVI

THE FIRST CARDS ARE PLAYED

It seemed to me that fully five minutes elapsed before either of us spoke; yet I am, of course, aware that this could not have been the case. Nevertheless, Time appeared to pause for me as I looked down, fascinated, at the wonder that lay in the hollow of Rathouse's hand. I might have been Colonel Vandeleur, the Reverend Rolles, or Prince Florizel, from the "New Arabian Nights," covetously admiring the Rajah's diamond. Here was what looked a rather dirty piece of glass, as big as a cuckoo's egg, that could make a man a gentleman of means for life. One thought of the joys of travel, good wine, and the satisfaction of being able not only to admire the picture of one's choice in a gallery, but to purchase it also. Money, money, money! Enough here to make a race-horse owner of Rathouse, or to secure for one charming, petulant woman a yacht worthy the ambition of Arnold Bennett.

"Lewis," Rathouse was saying in a strange, exultant voice, "a word with you in your tent." And he continued to stare at the stone, gloating on it, devouring it. "You and I," he seemed to say to it. "You and I." I watched him fear-

fully, suddenly conscious that I was no longer dealing with a civilized man but a savage worshipping a fetish. It was as though Rathouse had openly announced: "This is mine, and none shall lay a finger on it." For him I could see that nothing existed save this diamond; he was ravished by it. It had amused me to conjure up visions of what the stone could secure for a man, were he to yield to the temptation of attempting to take it for himself. But the Devil and Rathouse were already in complete accord over the matter; and I was painfully aware that, as the situation now stood, it was a case of two against one.

"Why the tent, Rathouse?" I asked him.

"I want to speak to you." He looked at me meaningly, his manner furtive and uneasy. As his eyes met mine, his glance became challenging, and his bearing aggressive. "We've got to talk this over," he announced.

"We haven't to *talk* it over. We've got to *hand* it over," I said sharply.

"In heaven's name, why?" he spat at me, snake-like, his eyes narrowed to evil little slits, and his hands trembling.

"Why not?" I demanded.

"Because it's a fortune, Lewis." He was whining like a puppy. "Hand it over? Are you mad, young fellow? Are you mad?"

"That is a question I might put to you," I remarked. But he ignored the thrust.

"Hand it over? You would never be such a fool!" he said hotly. "Hand it over? God, no! Who's to know we ever found it? And look here,

Lewis! I won't go back on you, man. It'll be share and share alike."

"Enough of that," I said spiritedly. "You come with me at once, and hand that diamond over to du Toit. That's what we've been paid to do, and that's what we're going to do."

"No!" His breath was coming fast, and he looked at me defiantly. "No! Do that, and as sure as—as sure as—as sure as I stand here, *I'll smash your blasted head in.*"

"Jan!" I called. "Jan! Run for the baas du Toit." And I flung myself on Rathouse, and threw him to the ground. Over and over we rolled on the red earth, panting, struggling, kicking. He was a man over forty, and hadn't my wind, but his arms were like steel, and he had a grip of iron. I had just succeeded in getting on top of him, and was sitting on his chest, when he made a final effort, hurled me over again, and kicked me in the region of the stomach. I let out a cry of agony, and turned sick and faint. But fortunately for me, at that instant, the bland, smiling face of du Toit appeared, and I saw him catch Rathouse by the collar.

"So?" said he.

"We've—found a diamond!" I panted. "Enormous diamond! Rathouse has got it. Was trying to take it. Don't let him go, there!"

Du Toit had quietly and slowly taken a revolver out of his pocket. "Now, Jim," said he, his voice soft and gentle.

"And who in hell, or out of it, trusts *you*?" Rathouse cried hotly.

"Young Lewis," said du Toit. "Not altogether a convenient thing for you, I admit. The sterling honesty of the Scot!" He stooped down, his little eyes shining, and lifted the diamond that Rathouse had reluctantly plucked from the breast pocket of his khaki shirt. "Ah!" he cried. "Ah! Now, here we are, gazing at each other with a wild surmise, silent, upon a peak at Grasfontein! Very pretty! I believe this stone must be worth anything from ten to twenty thousand pounds."

"You can cut out Keats," I said sullenly.

"Is your stomach troubling you, Lewis?" du Toit remarked facetiously. "A nip of brandy, perhaps?" He took a small flask from the pocket of his jacket, and handed it to me, whereupon I gulped down some of the contents, and struggled to my feet. "Have done with your nonsense," I said irritably. "I'm tired of this mountebanking. I don't trust any man on these diggings, and it's as well you should know it. That diamond is going to be handed over to Mr. Darcy, and I should like to see it registered at once."

"You would like reporters after you in battalions, Lewis," said du Toit smoothly. "You would like everyone on the diggings to see the stone, and have them round you like bees about a honey pot. Well, I must disappoint you. Mr. Darcy will probably sell the stone in Europe. Naturally, he must be secretive about it. I am only acting according to my instructions—and according to common sense. You and I had better make for Johannesburg at once."

Rathouse had got to his feet, and was dusting the red earth from his trousers, smirking cynically.

" 'I like you not,' " said du Toit quietly. " Shakespeare, Rathouse. Apt quotation. If I were you, I'd go away somewhere for my health—I don't think the salubrious air of Grasfontein suitable for you, much longer. Either you make yourself scarce, or I shall send you off to that pleasant holiday resort where Archie Reitz is now recuperating. . . . I give you five—ten minutes. I mean it, Rathouse."

Rathouse smiled contemptuously, lifted his battered hat from the ground, and ambled off, defiance expressed in every line of his body. Du Toit stood looking after him, and then turned to me, his manner grave and imperious. " Still doubting, Thomas ? " he remarked. " It's going to be a pretty kettle of fish if I have to start arguing and reasoning with *you*, next. We've got to get into Johannesburg, but I don't intend travelling there to-night."

" Why not ? " I asked sulkily.

" For the very obvious reason that Rathouse thinks we are going. You heard me mention the fact before him."

" And are you afraid of Rathouse ? "

" Frankly, I am."

I stared at him. " I've heard something to the effect that you are a detective, du Toit," I remarked. " Kindly enlighten me on the point. I myself do not, for a minute, believe you to be anything of the sort."

"What you choose to believe, Lewis, does not interest me," he said calmly.

"Nevertheless, it interests *me*. A detective, I imagine, would not have let a man like Rathouse walk calmly out of the picture, only to reappear later on, the dashing highwayman, with a band of brigands, ready to hold up a car travelling to Johannesburg and rob its occupants of a priceless diamond."

"Lewis," said he, "you appear to be unusually perspicacious and intelligent."

"Not at all!" I said angrily. "You are merely unusually exasperating and stupid."

He smiled. "Come," said he, "I like to hear a Scotsman lose his temper; he almost always loses his English as well. One hears the letter R getting full justice. . . . As to this—well—rumour that I am a detective, I have heard you are the Prince of Wales travelling incognito, but I don't say, of course, that I altogether believe it. And then I have a nice sense of delicacy. . . . If it is the case that you are the Prince of Wales, Lewis, I respect your incognito, and although I feel constrained to congratulate you on your mastery of the Scottish accent, I shan't ask your Highness any direct questions. That little point now being settled, I should like to come down to brass tacks. There's no need to make a sensation out of this diamond discovery. I should like to go to a quiet hotel in Lichtenburg, sleep the night there, and travel comfortably to Johannesburg to-morrow. I ask you to accompany me. Mr. Darcy put me in charge of his affairs, and if you are unwilling to

fall in with my plans, you had better remain here."

"That" said I, "I shall never do *in any circumstances.*"

"Splendid!" he said suavely. "You are as useful as a bull-dog, Lewis. How you bark! I shall feel very safe with you. Have you got a revolver, by the way? Ah, yes, when Percy had finished with your gun, I remember it was restored to you. Good! Well, then, you'd better collect your gear, and if this second trip of ours ends in coffins, let's hope we shan't be inside them."

"Come along with me," I said purposefully. "I don't let you out of my sight—no, not for a minute."

"Do I require to accompany you on your round of farewell, and stand by while you salute Miss Lorenzo? Oh, you British, with your tedious standards of duty and honour!" He put a hand on my shoulder, and together we walked towards my tent. "I honour women, you know, Lewis. In theory, that is to say. In practice, one does the other thing, of course, like one's neighbour. So much more entertaining, you must admit. If duty is something that forces one to shake Miss Lorenzo by the hand, there must be something wrong with duty. But 'England expects. . . .' Well, let us make haste." He paused at the door of the tent, and watched me as I flung my belongings into my valise. "I feel like that toad 'ugly and venomous,' wearing the precious jewel in my breast pocket instead of my head, you know. Do you dislike toads, Lewis?"

"They croak too much," I said tartly. "And now," I finished, closing my valise, and strapping it, "I'm ready."

"You have no goodbyes?" he inquired affably.

"None," said I. "You see," I wound up, "I intend coming back."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE KNAVE OF CLUBS AGAIN

Du Toit and I travelled to Lichtenburg that evening by bus, and made our way to an unobtrusive, third-rate hotel, where he proposed we should put up for the night. It was a shoddy, mean building, high and narrow, the front windows looking on to a side road, and the back ones overlooking an untidy strip of garden. We asked for a room containing two single beds, and were unable to secure it ; the proprietor, an amiable but rather fussy Swiss, explained that married couples had to be old fashioned in Lichtenburg. "We have ze large bed," he said, smiling and showing a mouth full of gold. "The two so leetle beds ? No !"

"Now, I ask you, Lewis, is that double bed one whit too large for a gentleman who could play Falstaff ?" said du Toit, pointing to the bed in the bed-chamber to which we had been conducted. "You and I cannot *both* sleep in that bed, Lewis. I should over-lay you, like a careless mother her newly-born babe." He chuckled softly.

"It is ze *leetle* beds you like ?" said the Swiss.

"For single gentlemen, yes," said du Toit. "For those in wedlock, twin beds are a folly our ancestors were never guilty of. What do twin

bedsteads remind you of, Lewis? To me they are like London and Paris, with the channel in between."

"And monsieur does not care for ze sea?" said the proprietor archly.

"You are right," said du Toit. "I was always a poor sailor." He stood laughing gently, his fat cheeks shaking. "Where can you fix up my companion, young Lewis?" he demanded. "He is anxious to be near me. I take fits, you know. He has to be in attendance."

"There is ze room right over this. The others—no! Full up!" The proprietor shook his head.

"Are you willing to sleep on the floor, Lewis?" du Toit asked. "Or will you really trust me alone?"

I was in a quandary. But a peep at the room immediately above that about to be occupied by du Toit caused me to make a decision. Of du Toit I was anything but certain. He was unusually elated and talkative, and his lewd jokes were being coined, I perceived, with a view to rousing me out of what he considered an ugly humour. I had been too precipitate, and had foolishly shown him my hand. He knew I suspected him, and was on his guard; I must, therefore, simulate indifference now, and appear both careless and trusting. The house was a shockingly built establishment, and the little bedroom to which I was shown had a floor of half-rotted wood, and walls from which the plaster was peeling in chunks. As I walked across the room, my eye caught sight of a tiny little hole in the centre of the floor, where

one of the boards had been eaten away. A native boy had taken me to the room, and as natives do not have much speech with their employers, as a rule, and I thought it unlikely that the boy would divulge my movements to the proprietor, I stooped down, and peeped through the hole. The plaster of the ceiling from du Toit's bedroom had apparently fallen away, for I found that from this little observatory I could see right into the room below. Anything more suited to my schemes could hardly have been imagined. I at once put down my baggage on top of the hole, lest du Toit should stray into my room and learn my precious secret, and went downstairs whistling.

"Well," said du Toit blandly, "do you approve of your quarters?"

"I do not," said I, "but after weeks of camping out, I daresay they will prove quite luxurious. Much as I love you, the thought of a bed to myself for the night forces me to leave you."

"It is dinner-time," he said pleasantly. "But alas! Lewis, they will not be able to supply me with my favourite Van der Hum here. Nor yet Jeripico. Nor yet Maritornes. Do you care for Maritornes?"

I told him that I had never heard of such a wine.

"No more have I!" he shouted jovially. "Maritornes is not a wine. She is a wench of rare vintage, with a proper understanding of the real meaning of hospitality. You should know Cervantes better, Lewis. Your ignorance occasionally grieves me; Sherlock Holmes, in you, would have found a wonderful successor to Watson. The Scot amazes me, Lewis;

he is so full of his own literature, and his own land, that it is difficult to convince him that other lands and literatures exist. Now, look at Carlyle! *There* was a Scot who read German and French works in the original, and what happened? The revelation stunned him!" He began walking towards the dining-room. "I like my appetite better than your appreciation of my wit," he finished. "It is much, much keener."

I was careful to eat sparingly at dinner, for a man who dines too handsomely is apt to drowse, and I had a long vigil before me. Du Toit consumed an enormous meal, and washed it down with four liberal glasses of South African port. Several men, unkempt and greasy-looking, and obviously diggers, dined at three other little tables in the room, and in the corner was a weedy young commercial traveller, reading a two months' old English magazine. It was a sordid enough hotel, in all conscience. A battered old piano grinned with yellow, stained keys, like decaying teeth, from an alcove, and there was a linoleum on the floor such as the British working classes put in their kitchens. It was the kind of room that depresses me unspeakably—cheap, shoddy, shabby, cheerless. But du Toit seemed unaffected by the general air of discomfort and desolation. Afrikanders, I have noticed, do not treat houses seriously; they camp in them for the night, preparatory, one would imagine, to trekking the next day. As for hotels, they expect nothing of them, and are therefore not disappointed. Du Toit was, at all times, indifferent to surroundings; his love of himself, and absorption in his own affairs,

was so intense, that he felt no other craving, and was conscious of no other need.

As one of the diggers commenced playing the piano from ear, and torturing the sweet silence of the night with ungodly discords, du Toit suggested we should go to our rooms. "I am going to read," he announced. "I have a favourite author, Lewis. His works abound in murder and mystery, and his name will live when many other writers are forgotten. Edgar Wallace? Happily, no! William Shakespeare." He rose. "As for you, Lewis, you had better sleep."

I lied magnificently, and said that such was my earnest intention. We went upstairs, and I parted with him at his door, and then ascended to my own room. Once there, I lighted two candles, and pulled the window screens along, making a great deal of commotion, as though engaged in preparations for bed. It was only nine o'clock, but the South African, living on the veld, goes to bed at a ridiculously early hour, and often lies reading until midnight. Du Toit had all the typical Afrikander habits. As I squinted down the little crack, I saw, from my observatory, that he was undressing. He looked enormously stout in his shirt, as he stood, trousers off, and bare legged, like a gigantic hen fattened for table, whose legs appear too frail to carry the weight of its body. He struggled into his pyjamas, panting like a winded runner, and leaped boyishly into bed with a book; but having settled the clothes round his ungainly body, so that the bed looked like a miniature of Table Mountain, he suddenly decided to leap out again.

He made for his waistcoat, took a little leathern bag that contained the diamond, and having attached a cord to it, put it round his neck, and under the jacket of his pyjamas. Then, to all appearances extremely satisfied with this childish and foolish contrivance, he again vaulted friskily into bed. Not for long, however. He had arranged the clothes comfortably about him for the second time, when I was amazed to see him struggling to the floor again. Ah, it was the revolver, this time! Carefully he examined the chamber of it, and put the weapon on a little cheap wicker table beside the bed. He looked around the room, as if striving to remember if he should want anything else, and then confidently jumped on to his couch for the third time. "Thank heaven," thought I, "he is bedded at last." But I was in error. A minute had not elapsed ere he was again traversing the cold floor. The desired object, on this occasion, was his watch, which he looked at admiringly, and wound with studious care. This prized possession he placed beside the revolver, before scrambling into bed for what was now the fourth time. But I noticed he moved slowly, now; the buoyancy which had characterised his first leap was conspicuously absent. Nevertheless, he arranged the blankets about his person with praiseworthy patience, opened his book, and began to read. I doubt, however, if he read for more than ten minutes, for presently I saw him nod, nod, nod, nodding, and soon his fat chin dropped on his breast, the book slid sideways down the precipice of his chest to the floor, and he was snoring loudly.

The fact that another few years would see du Toit in his dotage struck painfully home to me. Du Toit, who, with his immaculate grooming, and love of quotations, had seemed an enigma, now appeared in a tragically plain and pathetic light. I saw that the business of dressing must be his sole concern for the day, since disrobing, with him, was such an ordeal. I saw, indeed, that he was simply what is known as a "fussy old woman," a bachelor in the fifties putting on flesh, growing eccentric, interested only in food and wine, lewd jokes, and his own personal comfort. To see du Toit lying snoring, mouth open, the string of the bag containing the diamond round his fat neck, was to see du Toit revealed as fool and simpleton. I saw now, with disturbing clearness, that he was capable of believing Rathouse's story of the "accident" to my head; in some things (diamond selling, for example) he could be more than alert, but over-eating and age occasionally made him muzzy. He was certainly muzzy enough now. My one hope was that the very stupidity of his conduct would ensure safety for the diamond. Surely no thief of intelligence would credit the fact that a man in possession of a valuable diamond would tie it round his neck with a piece of twine, like a baby's soother, and then conveniently fall asleep, and invite robbery? For that was certainly what du Toit was now doing.

He slept for an hour (I kept faithful watch), then stirred himself drowsily, blinked, and blew out the candles. I listened eagerly, in the darkness of my room, and heard him snoring sonorously. He was

asleep again. Wondering if I should try to keep awake much longer, I opened my window, and leaned over it. It would be difficult for a thief to get into du Toit's bedroom from outside, without a ladder; there was no porch over the door, or balcony outside the window. This was all to the good. I had noted these matters before, but now a glance down at the street reassured me. Du Toit was bound to have his bedroom door locked, and as none knew in the hotel of the existence of the diamond save himself and me, I felt that he was comparatively safe, or that, if anyone *did* force the lock of his door and attack him, I should hear the disturbance quickly enough to effect a rescue.

The escapade with Billie, on the previous night, had robbed me of hours of sleep; try as I might, I could not keep awake. I was like a drugged man; my tiredness acted on me like morphine. I lay down on my bed and tried to struggle against the overmastering inclination for slumber by repeating passages of poetry learned at school, but the soft darkness, and the silence, were more potent than a lullaby, and I fell into a deep, deep sleep.

I was awakened by something that sounded half like a gurgle, and half like a cry, and caused me to sit up, rigid, every hair of my head on end, and my heart pounding. I listened. The sound came again, this time feebly, and more like a groan. I shouted out: "*What's that?*" sprang out of bed, struck a match, lighted a candle, and ran to the door of my room.

In the lobby I met a man clad in pyjamas, holding a candle. "What is it?" he asked quickly.

There seemed to be a dreadful commotion in the house. Doors were opening everywhere, and people in night attire were standing about blinking like owls. I ran downstairs to the second flat, and a man cried loudly: "It's murder, that's what it is!"

"What's happened?" I demanded frenziedly, running to du Toit's bedroom. The door stood wide open, and the room was full of people—men in pyjamas, and women in nightgowns, standing curiously round the bed. Thrusting some of them aside, I saw the figure of du Toit, the mouth wide, the eyes staring, a broken string round his neck. . . . It made me feel, suddenly, that my stomach had given way, and that I had no legs. . . . I stood, transfixed with nausea and horror. The whole thing was like a nightmare—the harpy-like women with the candles, the ghouls of men. Voices floated in the air above me like the voices in a dream.

"Sandbagged, I say."

"Is Doctor Van Bruggen coming?"

"All I heard was the first scream."

"It isn't murder, Mr. Verdier! He's breathing!"

"That's what I thought."

"Sandbagged! D'you reckon it was robbery?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"Great heavens, no! There's his watch."

"*Almachtig!* I know that man well. I reckon I've seen him scores of times at Grasfontein."

"Have you? I've never seen him. Do you know who he is?"

The last voice had a familiar intonation. Half unconsciously I turned, and found myself gazing into

the face of the blonde Anita. Anita, of course ! I should have known that doll's hair of hers anywhere. And she didn't know du Toit—she who had ogled him for weeks ! She met my stare with a confused flush, and made for the door. But suddenly I was fully awake ; my wits were restored to me. I was after her like a hare, and as she opened her bedroom door I pushed her inside, closed and locked it, and put the key in my pocket.

"This is *my* room," she began, surveying me nervously.

I laughed rakishly, and lifted a bottle of Cape brandy off the dressing-table. "D'you mind?" said I, helping myself to a little. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good, you know. Such a fuss in the place ! I don't suppose anyone saw me come in here. And in any case you are not going to be unkind, surely?"

She smiled, and appeared suddenly composed. A weight, I perceived, had been lifted from her mind. I had but to play my fool's part, and then seize my opportunity.

"That was wise of you to say you didn't know him, Anita," I continued, coming closer to her. "What's he been up to, now? Pretty tight, I'll wager, and someone tried to biff him, and pinch his watch. I'm not letting on I know him, either. Awkward. Ask a chap all kinds of questions." I fingered her dressing-gown. "That's a confoundedly pretty thing," I exclaimed admiringly.

"Do you like it?" she asked, beaming on me, her voluptuous bosom swelling under the folds of the peignoir.

I put my arm round her waist. "Anita," said I, "you never had much time for a chap down at Grasfontein."

"Well, young blood likes young blood," she said skittishly.

"Humph," said I, "come to that, Anita, I'd sooner have the gratitude of forty than the impertinence of eighteen." And I pressed her amorously, and then lifted her off her feet and laid her on the bed.

"You *are* a knut," she gurgled softly, twining her arms about me, and offering me her lips. I caught her firmly, then, and held her down; but the kiss she invited did not come, for I put my mouth to her ear, and whispered fiercely: "*Where is that diamond?*"

She gave a faint scream.

"Move," I said hoarsely, "and I'll strangle you!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CHASE COMMENCES

How strange it was to find oneself staring closely into Anita's face ! Candle-light, always so kind, was scarcely kind enough for her. Her face was old, old ; like her body, it sagged. Her eyes glistened evilly with belladonna, and under them was a web of little wrinkles. The hair, a bright tow colour, showed streaks of grey where the dye had apparently worn off, and her hands were the puffy, loose-skinned hands of an old woman. What a hideous joke Time had played on poor Anita, the one-time trapeze expert, young, buxom, a figure to charm and captivate a circus audience. The world had now all but finished with circuses, and Anita had now all but finished with tights and spangles. Here she was, English born—she had a strong Devon accent—stranded out in a little dorp in the Transvaal, with heaven alone knew what kind of old age ahead of her. She could be pardoned for trying to steal and cheat, since from her life had stolen and cheated everything. I pitied her from the bottom of my heart ; but I could hardly be expected to allow her to appropriate somebody else's diamond. The possession of such a stone would have prevented the death of the ill-starred

lady Leslie, who had died of dysentery and neglect ; it could have saved Percy ; it could have given Rathouse money enough to squander at will ; it could have provided Anita with a cosy flat, clothes from the Rue de la Paix, and orchids out of season. But the diamond belonged to Shirley Darcy. Useless to argue that life had given that young lady quite enough ; the diamond was *hers*. What is more, I was willing to risk my neck in recovering it for her, so strange and wonderful a thing is love.

"Look here," Anita was saying, "what's all this talk about a diamond, young sir ? You're diamond mazed."

I told her, impatiently, not to bluff. "Not that I intend being too hard on you," I assured her. "If it's the case that you're in straits for cash, I'll let you have some money if you hand over that stone without further ado."

"I like that ! In straits for cash," she echoed. "Who the dickens isn't in straits who has to collect their wages off a mantelpiece or a dressin' table ? And don't you go crushin' in my stomach, leanin' so hard, you young rip, there, for my inside's been slippin' this while back, and I wear a surgical belt."

I apologized profusely.

"D'you think I care a dem ? " she said hoarsely, and began to sniff. "You can make giblet soup of me, young sir ! I've had three operations, and I'm due for my fourth. Toomers, if you want to know. So what the hell does *anythin'* matter to me ? "

I felt vastly uncomfortable. "Now, see here,

Anita," said I, "I'll promise to do decently by you if you give me that diamond. You can't dispose of it, and in any case, if you won't hand it over——"

"You can bring in the strong arm of the lawr?" she sneered, and then suddenly began laughing and crying hysterically. "I haven't got it," she cried triumphantly, "I haven't got it! And I don't care who has it, or whether you get it or not!"

"You know something?" I cried angrily.

"Of course I know something!" She sat up. "*I let Jim Rathouse in my window, if you want to know.* And he's been gone a good twenty minutes now."

I felt I could have throttled her.

"Where did he go?" I demanded.

"You think I'm going to tell you, I suppose?" And she began laughing again. "You think I'm going to *tell* you?"

"You *shall* tell me," I said desperately. "You'll tell me right now, or I'll hand you over without a minute's delay. I mean it. As for imagining that Rathouse will ever share his spoils with *you*, you might as well realize at once that you'll never see a penny of his money. Not a penny! Not a farthing! Not a red cent!"

This seemed to sober her somewhat. She looked at me gravely.

"Do you really believe Rathouse intends to dispose of that diamond and return to you?" I snorted angrily. "Woman, are you crazy? You'll never see him again."

Her face grew suddenly haggard. "He is very

fond of me," she said, without, I may add, either enthusiasm or conviction.

"On the diggings, as a penniless man. Not on a Union Castle boat with a fortune in his pocket," I said brutally.

She began to sob in real earnest.

"I'll give you fifty pounds to tell me where he's gone."

Silence.

"Sixty."

Silence.

"Eighty."

Silence.

"One hundred."

There was a long pause Then : "Can you pay down cash ?"

"Not now. But you can trust me, surely ?"

She said quietly : "Why should I trust you ?"

"Why should I trust *you* ?" I argued. "For aught I know, your information may be a pack of lies."

"I'm telling you the truth," she said resentfully.

"He's on the way to Ventersdorp. He was getting a car from the garage in the next street."

"You swear ?" I said, taking her roughly by the shoulders.

"Yes, and be quick about it !" she cried. "All this commotion outside ! They'll be searching rooms, and what not ! Out you get, you young fool ! I *want* that hundred pounds !"

She did. It was a ten to one chance that she was lying to me and sending me on a fool's errand ; but I took the chance. I felt by intuition—call it

what you will—that she had told me the truth. The thought of Rathouse playing the gallant on a Union Castle liner had proved too much for Anita. She was only human ; her vanity had been wounded, and she resented being made the cat's paw, and deserted. There was a great deal of noise going on outside. Someone was shouting : " Where is the young man who was with him ? " and I knew people were looking for me. The sensible thing would be to open the door, announce the loss of the diamond, call in the police. . . . But I shrank from doing the (supposedly) sensible thing. By the time I had explained everything, Rathouse would be miles away ; I felt there would be time enough and to spare in which to explain things when I had failed to lay my enemy by the heels, and not before.

I ran to the open window and looked out into the blackness. Anita's room faced the back, and below it was the roof of the stoep, or kitchen out-house. The drop from the window to the roof was about four feet. Gently I let myself down with my hands, and then squatting on the galvanized iron of the roof, permitted myself to slide. I slid to the edge, turned abruptly, and clinging with both hands, lowered my body, and then dropped. The drop was a terrific surprise to me. I had estimated the height of the stoep at about fourteen feet at most ; it seemed more like twenty, and the shock of striking the ground sent me sprawling, and seemed to give me an ugly wrenched sensation about the neck. As I picked myself up, feeling slightly shaken, somebody close by let out a weird howl and ran away, the feet patter, patter, pattering, hell for

leather, in the darkness. Evidently I had startled a native, for the cry was not the cry of a white man, and the pattering suggested bare black feet. I ran quickly to the end of the garden or yard, vaulted a small paling, and tore off at top speed to the garage in the next street. If Rathouse could hire cars, I also could hire them, even if the garage-keeper had to be roused out of bed to oblige me. Panting, I rounded the corner of the street, hoping against hope that I would see a light over the filling station door. I hadn't the remotest idea what the hour was. I believed I had fallen asleep about ten-thirty, and now judged that it might be about one o'clock, or more, in which case the filling station must have closed hours ago. As I swerved round and caught sight of a shaft of light cutting the darkness like a bright knife, I could have shouted. Approaching, the light grew to a broad amber pool that flowed from the portals of the garage, and in the midst of the pool, like an idol, its intestines indecently exposed in coils of cable, was a huge petrol pump of vivid scarlet.

Beside the petrol pump stood two men, one of them busy with the coils, and near by was a battered old touring car. I was running softly on my toes, preparing to dash up and emulate King Richard by demanding feverishly: "A car! A car! A kingdom for a car," when the shadow of the other man's face, reflected on the white wall of the garage, caused me to leap aside into the darkness. Rathouse! There was no mistaking that Red Indian profile of his, with the hooked nose, and clear-cut chin. And here he stood, leisurely smoking, talking

pleasantries with the garage-keeper, his hat at a rakish, careless angle, the collar of his coat turned up, one hand on the door of the car, and the other in his pocket.

Here was a curious picture—the thief engaged in idle conversation, standing in the full glare of the lamp-light, and myself trembling in the shadow as though the guilt of sandbagging and robbing a man in his sleep were mine. I felt I must challenge him immediately, but was uncertain of the garage-keeper; he was laughing at Rathouse's jokes with the empty, inane laughter of a sycophant. No doubt he was being paid handsomely for the hire of his car; were I to put in an appearance now, it would be a case of two against one. I got down on hands and knees, and crept closer. The back of the car was towards me; if headlights were switched on, I would still be comparatively safe.

The night was clear and cold, and the moon being young, its light was pale and strengthless. The stars glittered, frosty and aloof. On the slab of concrete at the filling station door, one could hear the ring of the garage-keeper's boots. Sound travelled swiftly. Within about fifteen yards of where the men stood, I could hear their voices rising and falling melodiously with that sweet distinctness that so charms the crystal-set enthusiast when he "listens in" on a clear night. "What you got to watch with 'pendicitis is the peritonitis followin'," the garage-keeper was saying confidentially.

"My brother isn't too strong a chap," Rathouse answered. "He had blackwater fever, you know."

"I thought that was usually fatal," said the man.

"Is it, now? He had it pretty badly, I know," said Rathouse. "I'll be surprised if he gets over this. I've no faith in surgery. Get the knife on you, and I reckon you're done."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. My old uncle had gall stones, and they done wonders removin' them, and now 'e's gotten one of 'em on 'is watch chain, along with 'is masonic badges. I reckon 'e wouldn't part with that gall stone for a fortune. It's them weak ones with the 'Allelujah look that gets through operations. I seen it 'undreds of times. Walk on to the operation table, and out you goes, feet foremost. But if ye're *carried* on, it's twenty to one you come out of the clorriform a new bein'. If your brother's one o' them sickly kind 'e's all right."

Rathouse produced some notes and began counting them.

"Ye'll remember to leave the car in Von Brandis Square," said the garage-keeper. "Don't bother waitin' on my brother. Just leave the car, and the gear in it, and 'e'll get it." He paused. "Come in an 'ave a drink," he said genially.

Rathouse appeared to be in a hurry, but followed the garage-keeper into the garage, and one-half of the big door closed behind them. I was up in a second, and tip-toed over to the waiting car. The back portion of it was covered over with a tarpaulin, and beneath this covering lay a heap of shovels, picks, blankets, cooking vessels and utensils, rope, a folding camp bed, and countless other objects too numerous to note at a glance. This

was the "gear" to be left at Von Brandis Square—wherever that might be. . . . I thought I had noticed that name written up in a Johannesburg street ; indeed, I began to be certain that I had. Rathouse had fooled this garrulous simpleton of a garage-keeper into believing he was going to deposit the car, and this junk, at Von Brandis Square, where it was evidently expected. In all probability the garage-keeper had been taking the car into Johannesburg himself, and had been persuaded by Rathouse that the gear could be driven in by one whose anxiety to get to town was all-consuming. Rathouse, I remembered, had killed off an imaginary brother at Cape Town ; he was now hastening to the bedside of another about to undergo an operation. . . . I lifted the tarpaulin, and softly, softly, crept under it, arranging it over my head with trembling care. Not a moment too soon, either, for I heard the sound of footsteps approaching, and a voice called : " Say, have you seen a young chap go by this way ? Tall. Fair. Wore a khaki jersey, and khaki trousers. Got a lump of sticking plaster at the back of 'is 'ead."

" There ain't been nobody this way. What's the dust ? " This was the voice of the garage-keeper.

" Dust ! Chap been 'it round at the hotel. Stunned, 'e was. They brought 'im round. ' God ! ' 'e says, ' there was a diamond worth thousands round my neck. Where's Lewis ? ' Lewis was the chap that was with 'im. Young chap. Fair. 'E's bolted."

" Ye tell me that ! " said the garage-keeper.

"Who was hit?" This was the voice of Rathouse.

"Lemme see! Dutchie, 'e is. Du Plessis? No, that ain't it. Du Toit! That's 'im! Du Toit! Fat chap, about fifty."

"Oh, *him!*" cried Rathouse contemptuously. "Great guns, you don't need to pay any attention to him! He's balmy."

"Eh?" cried the stranger.

"He's been looking on the moon. Du Toit? That chap was in German East. Got sunstroke. He's diamond crazy. Always waking up screaming the place down, saying he's been robbed, going into fits, fainting, and shouting on the police. Can't help himself. You don't need to pay any attention to him,"

"Well, it ain't fair to 'ave a chap about like that disturbin' the commoonity," said the stranger. "Where did the young cub bolt to, then?"

"Him? He'll be chasing after some girl," said Rathouse casually.

"You should come round to the hotel," someone remarked.

"I've got more serious business, thank you," said Rathouse sternly. "I've a brother lying in Joh'burg hospital at death's door, and you ask me to come round and waste my time jawing to a moonstruck Dutchman." I heard someone vaulting into the car, and the next instant the engine was throbbing. "Goodbye," Rathouse called cheerfully, and the car began to move off, noisily and reluctantly.

There came a faint chorus of good-byes, and the

car was well on her way. Under the tarpaulin, I was lying in anything but an easy posture ; if my journey down to Grasfontein had been uncomfortable, my journey back was going to be even more so. Tins kept rattling, and shovels and picks gored my sides cruelly. The car was old, and in negotiating the bumps on the roadway, Rathouse apparently did not exhibit the genius of Hoxie, for each deep rut sent me shaking, and the car groaned as though it, too, suffered along with me. We seemed to be travelling at the rate of about forty miles an hour ; whenever the road was smooth, the pace was increased still further. I tried to forget Rathouse and the sharp points of the picks, and make my mind a blank ; it seemed to me that my very thoughts must reveal my hiding-place, so vivid and strong were they. Surely Rathouse must *feel* my presence. I certainly felt his acutely enough ; I could see, in my mind's eye, his tough, prehensile hands, clutching the wheel, could picture the carved profile, the cruel, grim set of the mouth. The darkness seemed thick and alive—alive with all kinds of unimaginable horrors ; I began to feel that it was no longer a man but a satyr who sat driving. The loneliness, the blackness, the cramped painful position, and the spirit of evil that seemed to dominate and pervade the car, were unnerving and weakening me. Let me confess it openly : I was terrified. Try as I might, I could not see how this escapade was going to end ; or perhaps I saw too well, and could not conjure up a vision of myself as the conquering hero.

On, on, on, the car went, over torn roads, reeling,

and creaking, and complaining. We may have been journeying for hours, but it seemed years—years of sinister darkness, black despair, and physical torture. I dreaded becoming so cramped that, when the time did come for me to move, I would be wedged, stiff, and caught like a rat in a trap. But, as it happened, the car suddenly lurched, skidded, and then stopped. I heard Rathouse muttering a husky “damn,” pregnant with meaning, and from what I gathered, he attempted to get the engine to restart. But the engine seemingly would not. Followed a few silent minutes, and then Rathouse leaped out, and I caught the sound of the bonnet being raised. We were, apparently, held up; either I must act now, or not at all. Any minute he might come searching at the back for tools. . . .

I threw the tarpaulin aside, scrambled to my feet, and took my automatic from my pocket.

“Rathouse,” I cried, “put your hands up!”

CHAPTER XXIX

HANDS UP !

WHEN I was very small, my favourite hero was Dick Turpin. Having decided that York was situated in a box-room on the third floor of my father's house, I would bravely charge there, occasionally holding up palpitating housemaids on the way, with that inspiriting and awful cry : " Hands up, or die." Many obliging servant lasses feigned death, or put up a gallant fight on the stairs, in order to make my ascent to York the more perilous or bloody. The height of my ambition, at that time, was to grow to manhood, and betake myself to the wilds in some land across the seas, where the casual killing of a few stray humans was no more than a man's legitimate occupation. To be proclaimed Sheriff, and spend my days playing dog-in-the-manger to cowboy criminals by holding them up with well primed pistols, and demanding their spoils or instant satisfaction, was the honest desire of my heart ; the fact that I had now attained it, in some small measure, afforded me anything but happiness. Here I was, an automatic in my hand, trembling with nerves, and painfully aware of a twentieth century complex which, try as I might, would surely *never* permit me to shoot. Perhaps,

in the days of the blunderbuss, men had blunderbuss consciences ; but here I was with a silver-plated automatic, and a conscience almost proportionately refined. My cry : " Put your hands up," had not been a command ; it had been a plea. And Rathouse alas ! could measure his man.

That he was startled—nay, dumbfounded at my appearance, is to put it mildly ; his hands shot up, and he gave me a glance of the bitterest scorn and hatred, his fine but cruel mouth curling contemptuously. " Lewis," he said quietly, and then added : " Still playing peeping Tom ! Well, well, this is all very smart and pretty ! "

Keeping my automatic still levelled, I attempted the difficult task of freeing my feet of tin kettles, coils of rope, and other impedimenta, and tried to open the door of the car and get out. He had been watching, panther-like, for this opportunity, however, and as I stumbled, I saw his right arm drop to his pocket. Once he got hold of his gun, I knew that a twentieth century complex would certainly not step between him and the using of it ; and a love of life, the primitive instinct for self-preservation, fear, or all three, suddenly metamorphosed me, in less than a twinkling of an eye, from a civilized being into a semi-savage. I cried : "*Hands up, there !*" and fired. The bullet shattered the wind screen, and a little shower of broken glass tinkled down. I can remember it all so vividly—the sharp report, the silence, and the sad patter of odd fragments of glass falling on the bonnet of the car. Rathouse looked at me mockingly, the curl of the lip, if anything, intensified ; but his hands

were up, and there was surprise in his eyes as well as contempt.

"Take your coat off," I said shortly.

"Why?" he asked, smirking.

"Because your revolver is in the right hand pocket of it. Unfasten the buttons with the left hand, but let it stray anywhere near the right hand pocket, and I fire."

"What if I refuse to take my coat off?"

"You'd better not refuse."

"Why?" His voice was insolent.

"Because I'll fire, if you don't do as I say."

"You'll shoot me down like a dog?"

My hand holding the automatic shook. The words, "shoot me down like a dog," buzzed insanely in my brain. Where had I heard those words before? On a sudden I was twelve years old again, memorizing Arthur Noyes's "Highwaymen" in the privacy of my attic bedroom.

"When they shot him down on the highway,

Down like a dog on the highway,

And he lay in his blood on the highway . . ."

"Yes, I'll shoot you down!" I shouted, with a ferocity I was far from feeling. I shouted like a frightened child in the dark, who cries "Begone," to a pack of imaginary goblins. But Rathouse mistook my pitiful bluffing for genuine determination, and to my surprise he began to take off his overcoat, unfastening it grimly with his left hand. The buttons undone, he threw the garment at me with a curse.

Still covering him with my automatic, I stooped and felt in the pockets of the overcoat. His revolver

was there. I was about to touch it, when he leaped a distance of about five feet, and all but threw himself on me. It was then that I fired again—this time in the air—and the shot apparently had a sobering effect on him, for he recoiled several yards. I had never used an automatic before; in trying to shoot wide, it was highly probable that I would hit him, and I think he was fully alive to this danger. In the full glare of the headlights of the car, we stood facing one another, grim-visaged and panting. His face, in sunlight a deep bronze colour, was now a chalky white; and his eyes, usually a blazing blue, seemed black as ebony.

"I want that diamond," I said quietly.

He grinned.

"Do you hear?" I cried angrily, for by this time I felt I could stand no more; my temper was thoroughly roused.

He treated me to a string of foul oaths, and began raving like one insane. "I picked you out of the gutter at the Cape. You hadn't a dam' cent——"

"And you took five pounds from a man in the train and kept the money," I flung at him. "Did you pick me up out of charity? You picked me up as a dupe." I advanced. "You betrayed Reitz, your own brother-in-law, and had him sent to prison because he was in your way; you stole hundreds of pounds' worth of diamonds from Darcy's claims, and put them through your own. You didn't think that I knew that? But I do! You conspired with Reitz to get a native to knock me on the head, and if the knock had been a little harder than it was, would have buried me at

Grasfontein in a packing-case, without a qualm. And lastly, a few hours ago, you all but murdered a defenceless man in his bed. I've had more than enough of you," I cried, my words coming so fast that I am certain half of them must have been unintelligible, "and this is the end! I *want* that diamond."

He began to expostulate.

"No," I thundered. "Give it me, and you go free. Refuse, and I'll——"

But he had suddenly put his hand in his breast pocket and tossed the little leathern bag, a fragment of string still dangling from it, at my feet. I swooped down upon it, and opened it with shaking fingers. He had not deceived me; the diamond lay there. But even as I stood looking at it he appeared to regret his rash act, and I saw him coming at me, his face twisted with passion, his huge hands curved like talons. . . . I leaped backwards, prepared to fire for the third time, and my finger touched the trigger. There was no report, and I realized, with a sickening shock, that the cartridge chamber of my automatic was empty. I had counted on six shots; somebody at the diggings must have been using my automatic without my knowledge, and now here I was, without a weapon of any kind, and my enemy within a yard of me. I turned and fled like a hare into the darkness, in the opposite direction from that in which the headlights were shining. But Rathouse was quick to realize what had happened; one minute, and he was after me. *Bang! Bang!* He had recovered his revolver from his discarded overcoat, and was firing

point-blank at my retreating figure. Oh, fool that I had been to forget that coat ! But indeed he had come upon me with such unexpectedness that I had not had time enough in which to snatch his gun. To stand my ground without a weapon would have been folly. I knew his strength ; we were equally matched in many ways, but to-night he had on him the frenzy of madness, and he would fight, not like a man, but like a devil, and fight as savages do, to kill. *Whiz!* A bullet sang close to my ear ; another struck the earth at my feet. I felt my bowels giving way ; I ran, breathless, terror-struck, my forehead moist with cold sweat. How long could this go on ? I was a good runner, but on the day of the rush Rathouse had shown that he, too, could do some sprinting. Granted a fair amount of wind and ammunition, it seemed that unless a miracle happened he must, in the end, wear me down, and hit me. . . .

I must get off the road. Poor as it was, it was serving as a guide for my enemy, leading him on my trail, pointing my whereabouts ; and so long as he kept up a good pace, and occasionally fired at random into the darkness, he stood a chance of plugging me. I made a sudden dive to the left, and began running across the veld ; then I dropped, and lay flat on my belly, my ear to the ground. All was dark—dark as a pit or the grave, and the chill night wind swept through my hair, and blew hard on my clammy brow, so that it felt as though the skin were being pressed on ice. Pound-pound—hammer-hammer-hammer went my heart. Oh, the darkness, the merciful, all-enveloping darkness !

I lay, eyes closed, breathing hard. Not a sound ! Rathouse, too, must be listening ! Opening my eyes again, and looking up at the sky, I judged by the position of the Belt of Orion that the hour might be about three o'clock in the morning. That gave me almost three more hours of darkness. Three hours ! I had better put as big a distance between myself and Rathouse before dawn came, as I could.

I lay for what must have been another twenty or thirty minutes, and then got to my feet again, and began walking softly and warily, feeling the ground in front of me with a light tap of the foot, before trusting my weight upon it. I had a wholesome fear of falling, in that pitch blackness, right over a small precipice into one of those huge holes or *dongas* that make walking on the veld at night so dangerous for the stranger. Anxiety to escape Rathouse's bullets had caused me to risk the *dongas*, when running ; I had chosen to face the lesser evil. But now I walked carefully, and it was well for me that I did so. I had not progressed very far before my right foot, tapping its way, came on air, and could not touch solid ground. I got down on my knees and felt with my hands. Air. Darkness. I put my leg over. No foothold. Here was a predicament indeed ; I might be on the edge of a small hole, or on the edge of a pit thirty or forty feet deep ! How was it possible to guess its depth or breadth ? I crawled along, in something of a panic, feeling the edge of the broken soil, but a sudden little landslide sent me slipping. I recovered my foothold, my heart in my mouth, and gained solid ground. But that

fall had completely demoralized me ; I had lost all sense of direction. I began to crawl away from the *donga*, not knowing whither I was going, and creeping on my hands and knees I moved slowly over the veld for what, perhaps, must have been another hour. The cold was cruel in its intensity ; my teeth were chattering, and my hands and face must have been blue. I felt my very scalp shrink with cold, and my stomach was sick with it. The wind seemed, literally, to sing through my bones, and a stabbing pain kept shooting behind my ears. If I put my arms over my head, and the wool of my jersey, for a moment, protected my ears, the sudden pounding of warm blood through the thawing numbness sent a pain shooting up my jaw that was worse than a hundred toothaches. I began to sneeze ; if Rathouse did not kill me before this night was over, it was evident that I would die of exposure on the veld, as so many hapless natives do, who are without shelter and blankets. I saw myself, like Captain Oates of the Scott Polar Expedition, walking on until I could walk no longer, and then lying down and waiting for the end. . . .

Half dazed and crazed with cold, I presently sighted the headlights of the car, and the figure of Rathouse standing beside the bonnet of it, examining the engine. I had been crawling towards the enemy instead of away from him ! Without the aid of the light as a guide, it is possible that I might have completed a circle, as lost persons always do, and have arrived back at the *donga*. How had I missed seeing the headlights before ? Had Rathouse returned to the car and switched

them off, and was now thinking better of this, and attempting to have another examination of the engine in the hope that he might be able to get the car to start again? I lay watching him curiously, envying him his coat, and after about ten minutes had elapsed saw him climb into the car. He did not reappear, and there was not a sound; evidently he had decided to go to sleep there, since there was nothing else for him to do. Crawling as silently as I could, I put a distance of about two hundred yards between me and the lights of the car, and having got ahead of the enemy thus far, made for the road again. Once on the road, I could walk briskly, and get up some circulation; the track might be bad, but it would at least save a man from breaking his neck in a *donga*. I began to trot along at a little run, beating my arms on my breast. If only I could reach a dorp and get a car at dawn! Once daylight came Rathouse, I knew, would be on the move again; if he could not get his own car to start up, he would hail the driver of the first vehicle that came along, and beg a lift, with a view to overtaking me. I blundered along in the darkness with aching limbs, stumbling, falling, barking my shins against boulders, bruising my hands on flinty stones and rubble. At length, after covering what was, perhaps, two miles of ground, I saw, out of the thick, velvety blackness, the glowing orange embers of a fire.

Beside the fire sat a man, crouching in a meditative attitude, his eyes upon a large black pot. Approaching warily, I noticed that two other figures lay on the ground, and that a mule was standing

a little way off, tethered to the wheel of a cart. As I drew near, the mule set up a despairing, mournful whinny, and one of the men stirred and started up, shouting out something in a native tongue that was incomprehensible to me.

"All right! All right!" I cried. "It is white man! It is friend." And staggering over to the fire I fell on my knees and held out my frozen hands to the blaze.

CHAPTER XXX

LAST LAP

I WAS accorded the warmest welcome imaginable. Most fortunately for me, I required to make no explanations in regard to my movements ; I was a white man, and therefore a being too superior to be questioned. But even if I had wished to be communicative, conversation was impossible. One of the men spoke very fluent Afrikaans, but his English vocabulary consisted of a few words only ; the other two natives spoke their own tongue all the time, and what that was I shall never know. From what I could gather from the Dutch-speaking native, who perseveringly tried to converse with me, he was a sort of pedlar, hawking old clothes about to sell to coloured women ; the other two natives had been working at Grasfontein, and he was giving them a lift in his cart by day-time, and camping with them at night. My informant, who called himself Franz, offered to make me a drink of coffee, and asked if I would eat, explaining with pride that he could give me bread. Bread, to the South African native, is as much of a delicacy as plum cake is to the schoolboy ; the native food is mealie meal, cooked, like rice, in a pot, and eaten in thick slabs. I perceived at once that Franz was a gentleman native ; he owned a mule and a

cart and ate bread ! I had rather he had not been quite so civilized, for a native who eats bread and meat, can write, and has been baptized, is almost always a liar and a thief. Franz, however, had an extremely engaging and ingenuous smile ; I felt I could trust him. But when he asked me if I had made any money at Grasfontein, I was careful to say that I had not, and tried to look downhearted. He also seemed depressed on hearing this, whereupon I put my hand in my pocket, and offered him five shillings. I would gladly have given much more for his hospitality, but to do so would have been to invite danger, and tempt him, perhaps, beyond his moral strength. But, as things were, the five shillings brightened him to the point of making him positively jovial, and he at once put a little water on to boil, and made me some coffee, which I drank out of a blackened cocoa-tin. It was coffee made without milk, and sweetened with a meagre little pinch of sugar, but it was as wonderful to me as the nectar of the gods. I had been chilled to the bone ; now it seemed as though my body were being recharged with new life.

The fact that Franz and his companions were beginning to prepare breakfast made me realize that it must now be about five o'clock, or perhaps later. Some mealie meal was put on to cook, and boiled until it became like thick, white porridge, after which it was allowed to cool, and cut into convenient chunks. One of the natives, whose ears were mutilated so that pendants of flesh, supporting pieces of cork, drooped down as ear-rings, crammed his mouth so full of mealie meal that his

cheeks puffed out like balloons ; one would have thought he was a fowl being fattened on the forcible feeding system. The stench of these men was sufficient to put a white man of squeamish tastes off his food ; but I was ravenously hungry. I ate half a loaf of boer-meal bread, and would have eaten more, I believe, had there been any of it left to consume. My companions laughed and talked in the gayest fashion, their flawless, gleaming teeth shining like polished ivory in the firelight ; and when the meal was over (and they lost no time in the business of eating) the mule was inspanned, and we all got into the cart.

We started off at a fair pace. Dawn was coming now, and the sky was a deep violet-blue, streaked with dark red. The splash of red widened, became orange, and grew luminous, while the grey veld turned blue-green, and then changed to its natural khaki colour. Another half-hour, and it was daylight, with the sun gently flooding the roadway and veld, making the track a bright streamer of terra-cotta broidering a cloth of gold. I had no means of knowing whither I was being driven, but I judged we were going into Ventersdorp. My distress was therefore acute when, in answer to a question asked in appallingly bad Afrikaans, I was told : " Ventersdorp ? *Niet, niet !* " and Franz pointed behind him. " Krugersdorp," he said, pointing ahead. " I go Krugersdorp. Ventersdorp yesterday. Finish."

Where was I ? Rathouse's car must have broken down beyond Ventersdorp, instead of a few miles off it, as I had imagined. I was now heaven alone

knew how many miles off Krugersdorp, unarmed, and liable to be overtaken by a car at any minute. Du Toit, by this time, must have raised a hue and cry, and the whole countryside would be on the look-out for me. Unless I myself could deliver that diamond into the hands of Mr. Darcy, the case looked very black against me. All cars coming from Ventersdorp would pass Rathouse; he had every chance of getting a lift, whereas it seemed to me that I had none whatever. I was sitting turning matters over in my mind in a fit of black despair, when the cart rounded a kopje, and I sighted a luxurious limousine drawn up by the wayside, and near it a lady in a neat sporting costume, and a man wearing a light motor coat. As the cart came alongside I asked Franz to draw rein, and scrambling out, went up to the gentleman and bade him good morning.

"Sir," I said politely, "are you, by any chance, going to Krugersdorp?"

He surveyed me critically, as well he might. My face and hair were caked with dust and dirt, and I had a lump of sticking plaster at the back of my head. My jersey was torn to shreds as a result of my crawling, and from the knee down the left leg of my trousers was ripped open, disclosing bruised and bloody flesh. The lady's glance was decidedly chilly; a poor white, in rags, travelling with natives in a cart, is a disgusting object to a colonial. She tapped a well-shod foot impatiently, and looked away.

"Yes, I'm going to Krugersdorp," said the man shortly.

"Then," said I, "I must beg the favour of a lift. My car broke down last night just a few miles out of Ventersdorp, and I am on most important business, and must get into Johannesburg as soon as I possibly can."

"Why?" he said impertinently. "Look here, young fellow, have you been fighting?"

"I met with an accident some days ago, was lost on the veld, early this morning, and almost fell into a *donga*. Is there anything else that you must know?" I demanded, with something like temper in my voice.

"My wife and I are going to Johannesburg, as a matter of fact," said the man coldly. "But who are you, anyway? One would like——" And he paused impressively, and looked at me, as who should say: "You are, of course, confoundedly dirty, and I only consort with gentlemen."

"I wish to go to a Mr. Darcy who resides in the Munro Drive," I told him.

"Ah, Darcy!" he remarked, his face brightening.

"Yes," said I, having measured my company, "do you know him?"

"Most people know Mr. Darcy," drawled the lady in a husky, affected voice, and again looked away.

"You want to see Mr. Darcy?" said the man pompously. "Well, perhaps we could——" And he opened the door at the back of the car, and waved his hand graciously.

I gave a handful of silver to Franz and the other two natives, and climbed into the limousine. "We may stay in Krugersdorp for a couple of hours," the lady warned me. "I hope you don't mind?"

I did mind very much ; but I held my peace. As the car started off, running over the bumps and ruts as softly as though the road were coated with asphalt, I lay down among the luxurious cushions and closed my eyes. The lady sat in front with her husband ; I am sure she was planning to have her servants spray the car with disinfectant, once I was safely out of it, and she was home again. We bowled along at a great rate, and the motion of the car sent me into a pleasant doze. When I awoke, it was to find that we were already in Krugersdorp, and that the gentleman and his wife were alighting from the car, which was standing before the gates of a large private house in a quiet road near the edge of the town.

"We're having lunch with some friends here," the gentleman remarked, slamming the door of the car. "You'd better get into town and get yourself a bite if you intend coming along with us the rest of the journey."

"There are some sandwiches in that basket beside you," said the lady icily, and walked away.

I did not wish to go into Krugersdorp ; to be arrested for theft at the eleventh hour, with victory so nearly within my grasp, would have been hard indeed. Nor did I wish to go to the police station, explain my plight, and ask that the diamond be delivered safely to its rightful owner. That would have been a tame conclusion to my adventure ; I would finish what I had begun, and take what risks remained. Fortunately for me, there was a goodly supply of sandwiches in the basket, and a bottle of ginger ale. I made an excellent meal, and then

lay down again, and covered myself over with a rug. It was unlikely that anyone would peer into the back of such a splendid car in the belief that it contained a diamond thief, but if they did, at a first glance they would notice no more than a lumpy-looking rug, spread carelessly along the cushioned seat. I waited and waited for the gentleman and his wife to reappear, but although what must have been three hours went by, I did not catch so much as a glimpse of them. This continued absence began to alarm me; I wondered if they had heard that a fair young man with a piece of sticking plaster at the back of his head was wanted on a charge of stealing a valuable diamond, and having decided that their passenger was a thief, had gone off to report the matter. I was on the point of getting out of the car and making a bolt for freedom, when the door of the house opened at last, and the gentleman and his wife came down the path in company with another lady. They shook hands, laughed, became wildly extravagant with their good-byes and promises to write and visit, and then the gentleman came over to the car and peeped in at me.

"Still there!" he remarked. "We stayed longer than we expected. . . . Didn't think you would wait. It's four o'clock."

"I fell asleep," I lied.

He and his wife got into the car, without another word, and we drove off. At last, at last! Four o'clock! They had held me up for four hours, and now it would shortly be dark. But we had only forty miles to cover. Forty miles, and then . . .

It was a quarter-past five by the Post Office clock when we reached Johannesburg. Here, somewhere in the vicinity of Market Street, the car slowed down, and the gentleman looked over his shoulder. "You'd better get out now," he remarked, "can't take you any further."

I thanked him for what he had done for me. "Can you direct me to the Munro Drive?" I enquired, getting out and standing on the pavement, painfully conscious of the scrutiny to which passers-by were subjecting me.

"Oh, better ask a policeman! Good evening!" he said shortly, and pressed the self-starter.

The lights of the town shone cruelly on my torn clothing and grimy hands. I skulked into a back street, and asked the first quiet-looking workman I met to direct me to the Munro Drive. He was an obliging little fellow, and most explicit in his instructions; but before he had time to question me about my business, and become talkative, I bade him good evening and set off in the direction he had indicated. It seemed that I had a goodish way ahead of me yet, and my limbs were cramped after the long rest I had enjoyed in the limousine. I found I was walking with the greatest difficulty. One ankle was swollen, and throbbed painfully, and every muscle of my body seemed stiff. I plodded on, my fingers travelling lovingly, every few minutes, to my breast pocket. There lay the diamond; I had fought for it, suffered for it, faced death for it. It was here—here against my heart. I had it! I had it! I clutched it with a rapture that sent little shivers of ecstasy running through

me. *Her* diamond! She would touch it soon. Soon, soon. . . .

I quickened my pace, my whole being pulsating with joy. I could have sung. The darkness came down, and the stars came out, and this time they were friendly stars, the stars that blink down happily on young love. Every now and again I stopped to ask: "Is this the Munro Drive?" And at last, after what seemed an interminable time, a voice said: "Yes, this is the Munro Drive. Darcy? Oh, that big house over there! Yes! The one with the turrets. To your right, there . . ."

"The one with the turrets." I looked, and out of the sweet blue darkness, the house rose like a faery palace, pure as mother-of-pearl in the tender light of the young moon. There were lights at the windows, shining a bright amber, and tall black trees stood silhouetted against the house, patterning the white walls with a network of ebony shadow. As I reached the gate of the drive, I paused for a moment, listening to the melodious *clang-dong-clatter-clang-dong* of a Burmese gong summoning the household to dinner. The vestibule of the house was flooded with light, and a native servant in a white suit, with a sash of jade about his waist, came out and looked speculatively into the darkness. I was watching him, and was on the point of advancing, when there was a rustle in the hedge beside me, a figure leapt on my shoulder, and the voice of Rathouse said thickly in my ear: "Lewis, Lewis! Ah, Lewis!" The next instant, and a pair of hands were feeling for my throat; another minute and I was on my back. . . .

I shouted, struck, screamed, kicked, and fought like one demented. And, indeed, I *was* demented. To be balked within a few yards of my goal. . . . That four hours at Krugersdorp! That fatal four hours! Rathouse had, of course, got ahead of me; he had guessed by intuition that I wanted to carry home my prize in triumph, single-handed, and had been lying in wait for me behind the hedge. My fury and disappointment lent me strength. His hands were on my throat, but mine were on his wrists. . . . I twisted his arms until he yelled with agony, and then over and over we rolled. Over and over. Over and over. I was astride him now, my thumbs pressing his windpipe. I raised his neck and bashed his head on the ground. Again and again. Again and again. I was mad. My nostrils were streaming blood, and I was laughing diabolically. . . .

Presently a fog in my brain seemed to clear, and I stood up. I looked down at Rathouse's body uncomprehendingly; he was moving feebly, moaning quietly. I stared at him dully, and then began to walk towards the house, but as I walked the door seemed to recede farther and farther away from me, and then come close again. The light danced and flickered; one moment it was blinding me, and next moment everything was black. My foot touched the first step, and I made a dive for the door. The light came at me again, and I saw I was standing inside the hall, and that people were running up to me. . . . Voices, voices. . . .

"Baas, will you come quick? There is white man here."

"What do you say, Joseph?"

"There is white man here. . . ."

Scuffle, scuffle, scuffle. The whole thing was happening miles and miles away. . . .

"Eh, dear, dear! What's this? Good heavens, this poor fellow has been hurt! Young man, will you sit down?" Somebody was touching me. "Bless my soul—Yes, it is! Lewis! I say, Lewis! What's the matter, Lewis? Whisky there, Joseph! He'll be off in a minute. . . ."

Somehow or other I could not utter a sound, and I was gulping, gulping, gulping. The bright colours of the rug were dancing about like confetti. Gulp, gulp! Messy, nasty salt taste! Blood. I was sitting on a chair now, and the benign countenance of Mr. Darcy was floating all around me. Whisky's coming. . . . Shirley! Are you there, Shirley?"

"Daddy?" There was a quick, light patter of footsteps. . . .

"Oh, Mr. Lewis! Oh, *Talbot!* Oh, *oh!*" And then the miracle happened. Shirley was beside me, Shirley in some wonderful white thing like a cloud, Shirley with her fearless dark eyes, her soft dark hair, her warm, trembling mouth. . . . *My Shirley.* . . .

I took the diamond from my breast, and laid it in her lap.

CHAPTER XXXI

I GO NAP

"AND now," said Mr. Darcy, after I had had a stiff whisky and soda, and a gentle hand had sponged the dirt and blood off my face, "let's hear about this, Lewis. Let's hear all about it from the beginning."

I began to talk, slowly at first, and a little awkwardly, but after a while, encouraged by the kind glances of the audience, and of one member of it in particular, I warmed to my subject, and told my story, just as I have set it all down here.

"But, Lewis, I never got any wire or letter!" cried Mr. Darcy, as I reached that point in the narrative where I described how I had been knocked on the head, and Miss Lorenzo and I had dispatched a native to Lichtenburg with a letter and telegram.

"I thought natives were honest," I said whimsically.

"Perhaps not quite so honest as young Scotsmen seem to be," said Mr. Darcy, giving me a most hearty smack on the back. "And so?"

I went on to tell them how I had suspected du Toit; how I had tried to check the washes; how I had struck a pot hole for myself; how Percy and his lady had died; how I had buried them;

how I had discovered Rathouse's haul of stolen diamonds from Billie; how Hoxie had left me; how Reitz had been betrayed; how Rathouse and I had turned up the diamond in the wash; how we had fought over it, and how du Toit and I had made for Lichtenburg together.

"And he tied the diamond round his neck!" cried Shirley. "There, Daddy! I always *told* you he was a stupid old woman!"

"Go on, Lewis!" said Mr. Darcy breathlessly. He was pacing the floor with excitement. "Dear, dear, tied it round his neck, you say? Crazy, crazy! Sandbagged, was he? Well, what *could* he expect? That stone's worth a fortune. . . . Yes? You followed the woman? Splendid, Lewis, splendid! Oh dear, oh dear! A hundred pounds! Certainly, she must get that. She *did* tell the truth. And you went out of the window? Lewis, dear, dear! And caught him standing at the garage? Well, well! And got inside the car?" Mr. Darcy was panting. "And then you held him up?"

Shirley's face was white. "You fired?" She got hold of my arm, and as I went on with the tale kept crying out: "Oh oh! He shot at you point blank? He might have *killed* you, Talbot! He might have killed you!"

"And you were out all night? And you breakfasted with natives? You will have to make a novel of all this, Lewis! It's capital! It beats anything I've ever heard! Yes, yes? And he got you at the gate, there? Well, he isn't there now, but are we to report this affair to the police and have them deal out poetic justice?" Mr.

Darcy paused. "It's your affair, Lewis. You've a right to say."

"Let him go," I said, when the story had been told. "I only want——"

"Yes?" he said kindly. "What do you want, Lewis?"

"Well, firstly, a bath," I said wearily. "And afterwards——"

Mr. Darcy blew his nose. "Perhaps I can guess," he said slowly, and then called sharply: "Joseph! Show this gentleman to the bathroom."

Ah! that was a bath to remember all one's days! How lovely it was to stand watching the clear, pure water boiling down in a flood from the silver tap into the marble trough, a cloud of steam rising up in the air, and the mirror over the wash-basin veiled with vapour. A row of coloured bottles filled with bath salts stood on a glass shelf. I would have a little out of each; I would have a bath salts jubilee, and celebrate my victory over Rathouse with a bath fit for a Roman hero to die in. . . . In a fit of boyish abandon I scattered the crystals with a prodigal hand, and clambered into the pellucid water. Someone was playing the piano. I listened. Chaminade. One may get tired of Chaminade, but her work is so suited to the light, fresh touch of a pretty young woman. . . . And French music when one has been rash with bath salts! I stretched my weary limbs luxuriously, and smiled. I was happy, happy, happy! Some of my scratches and bruises were stinging viciously, but I did not seem to feel. . . .

Half an hour later, shaved and shampooed, and

clad in a flannel suit of Mr. Darcy's, I found Shirley alone in the lounge, looking somewhat self-consciously at a bowl of flowers.

"Aren't these pretty?" she said. "And did you have a nice bath? If you're ready, we're going to have dinner. We were only at the soup, when you——"

I said: "You play Chaminade's music very nicely, Shirley. But come here!"

She was very shy.

"Come along, young lady, I do not bring priceless diamonds for nothing," said I. And I took her over to the chesterfield, and sat down by her side.

Presently she said in my ear: "Do I kiss nicely?"

"Ah," I told her, "it is nothing to what you may yet do. . . ." And then her father came in, and we moved a little apart.

"My dear Shirley," said he, "I haven't heard a word yet about the *Shirley II*."

"Oh, *that*!" said Shirley. "I don't know that I want a yacht, after all."

"Eh?" He came over and stood before us.

"No. I want—I think, Daddy, I shall have a tour. I should like to see Scotland. I'd love to stay six months out of every year there, and six months here beside you."

"Oh, Lewis, what's this?" He was shaking his head. "You bring me a valuable diamond, and take my pearl without price." Gently he took Shirley's left hand, and laid it in my right one. "I haven't said that you don't deserve the pearl," he remarked kindly. "But, of course, only the

brave deserve the fair. . . . She has a temper, the minx ! But you seem to be able to fight, Lewis. You'll subdue her. . . . Her old father never could." He sighed. "A valuable diamond discovered, and one's only daughter betrothed ! One feels, Lewis, that one could do with some dinner, and perhaps a little champagne. . . ."

The door opened.

"Dinner is served, sir," said the butler.

.

Some days later, I wrote to my father.

MY DEAR FATHER (the note ran),

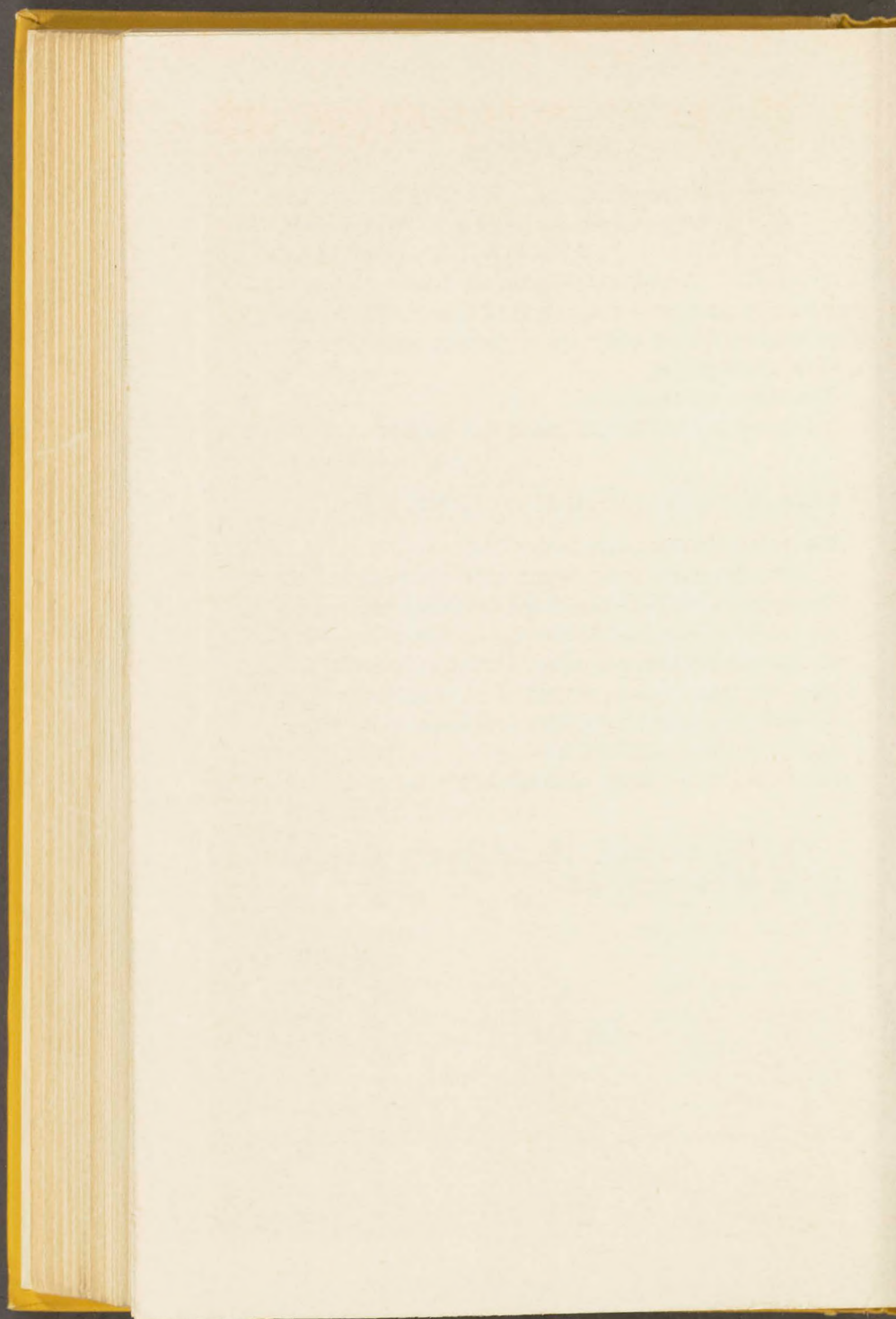
Something has gone wrong with the modernized version of the parable of the prodigal son. I've been to the diamond fields, and am returning with several thousand pounds. Perhaps it isn't too late to take one's degree. . . . I sail on the *Edinburgh Castle* on Friday, and hope to be home again in three weeks' time.

Your affectionate son,

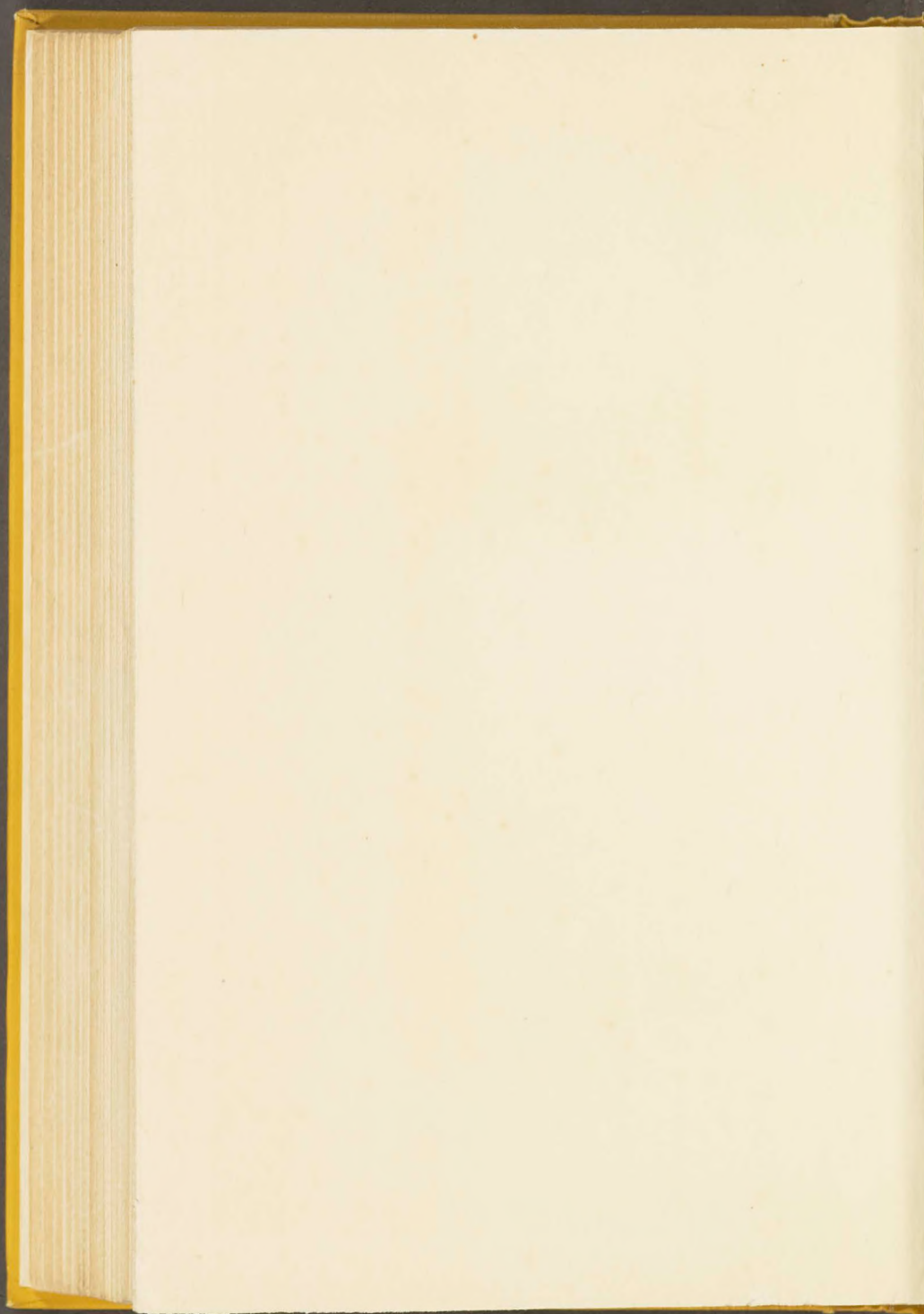
TALBOT.

P.S.—By the way, I'm bringing a beautiful young wife along with me.

THE END







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